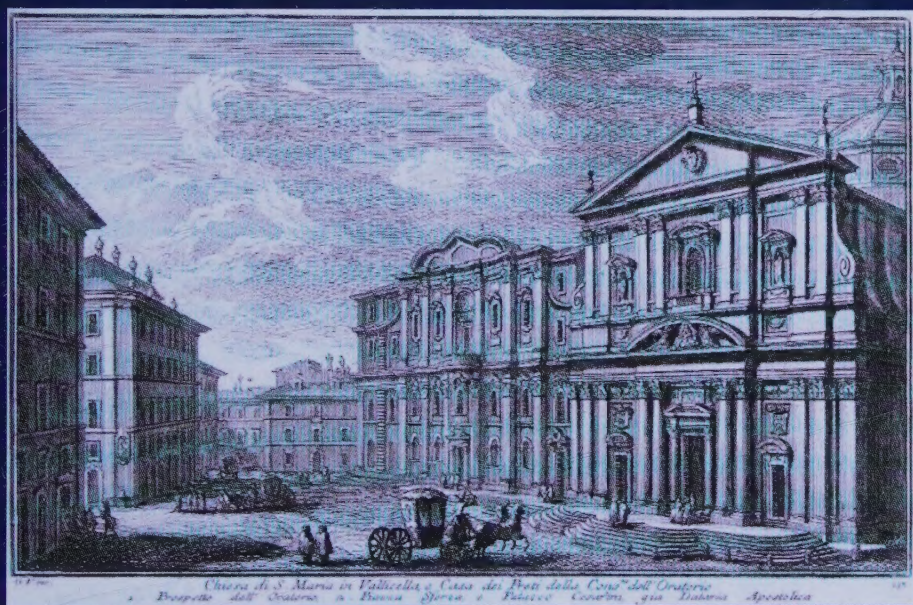
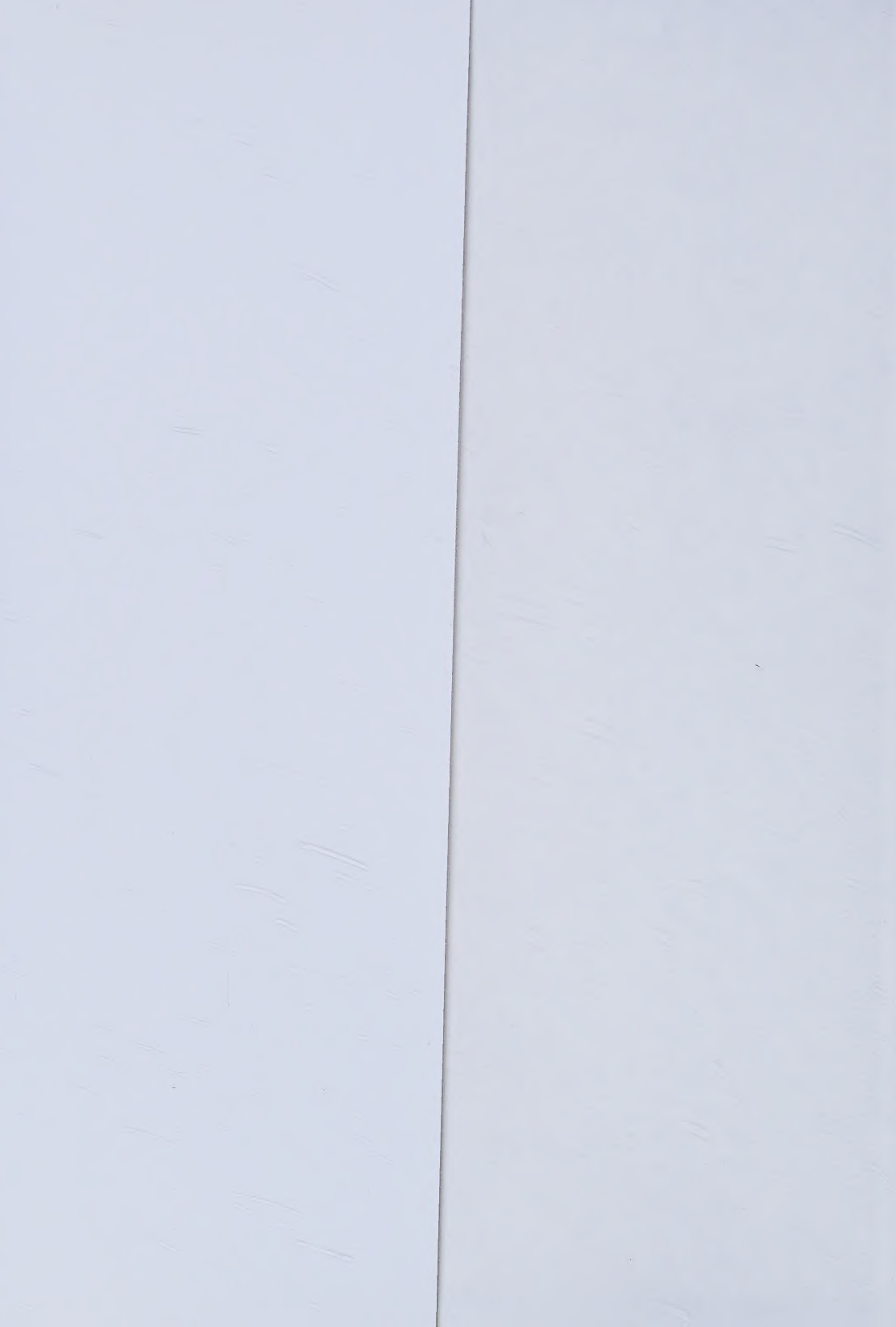


THE EXCELLENCES
OF THE CONGREGATION
OF THE ORATORY
OF ST PHILIP NERI



FR FRANCESCO ANTONIO AGNELLI


THE OXFORD ORATORY
MMXII



For Abbot Eugene, O. Praem
as a small token of
affection and respect
from all of us, at The Toronto Ontario

A. Robinson,

March 2014.



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THE EXCELLENCES OF THE
CONGREGATION OF THE
ORATORY OF SAINT PHILIP NERI

*Father Francesco Antonio Agnelli
of the Congregation of Savigliano in Piedmont*



*Translated from the Italian and abridged by
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OXFORD
MMXII

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TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

The text of the *Excellences*, as published in 1881 by Messrs. Burns and Oates, having been long out of print, is here transcribed for the use of the sons of St Philip Neri, who may copy it for their own use and the use of aspirants to the Congregation of the Oratory. The spelling and punctuation, peculiar though they be, have been preserved except for a few obvious errors, though translations of Latin quotations have been inserted. No attempt has been made to modernize or improve upon the author and the translator. If one were to do so, the chapter which seems most uncharacteristic of our Saint is no X, which appears to consider that the virtue of chastity demands the withdrawal of love from all our fellow creatures, whereas St Philip, of course, showed that charity is the key to chastity, and the virtue of purity frees us for a greater love of Christ in our neighbour. Chapter XI also seems rather like blowing one's own trumpet, and the fantasies of the neurotic nun should not be taken too seriously! With such few reservations, the *Excellences* remains still in our own century excellent as a guide to the spirit of the Congregation of the Oratory, and will be useful in the formation and reformation of our brethren. *Oremus pro invicem.*

J.F.A.B.

THE ORATORY, OXFORD

Feast of Our Lady of the Snows, 2006.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The book now offered to the public is a translation of the work entitled "Pregi della Congregazione dell' Oratorio di San Filippo Neri, opera postuma e prima d' ora inedita d' un Prete dell' Oratorio di Savigliano nel Piemonte." Published at Venice, 2 vols. 8vo, 1825.

In addition to the numerous Lives which exist of St Philip Neri, and of his first companions in the Roman Oratory, and of the many holy men who have joined his Institute,¹ there have been written various works on the Philippine Congregation; some historical, such as the well-known work of Father Marciano on the foundation of the Oratory in different parts of the world;² others ascetical, such as "La Scuola di San Filippo Neri;"³ or descriptive, as "L'Idea degli Esercizi dell' Oratorio;"⁴ or, again, bibliographical, as Villarosa's work, "I Scrittori Filippini."⁵

The aim of the present work is rather to present the peculiar features, the special Excellences of the Congregation of the Oratory; for every religious Institute has its proper features, which are in each case moulded by the circumstances of the times in which it arose, by the spirit of those who co-operated in its foundation, but above all by the genius of the Founder.

It may be asked in what consist these special Excellences? In what way do charity, purity, detachment, &c., as practised under the pro-

¹The following Lives have been published in English:—

The Life of St Philip Neri. 2d ed., 8vo. London. 1868.

Lives of the Companions of St Philip Neri. 8vo. London. 1847.

Lives of Fathers Valfrè, Santi, and Matteucci. 8vo. London. 1847.

Lives of Venerable Fabrizio dell'Aste and Venerable Mariano Sozzini. 8vo. London. 1850.

Lives of Father A. Talpa, Venerable Giov. T. Eustachio, and Father G. Prever. 8vo. London. 1851.

²Memorie Historiche della Congregazione dell' Oratorio, raccolte dal P. Giovanni Marciano, prete della stessa Congregazione. 5 vols. fol. Napoli. 1693-1702.

³La Scuola di San Filippo Neri dal Abbate Giuseppe Crispino. 8vo. Napoli. 1675. The School of St Philip Neri. Edited by Father Faber. 8vo. London. 1850.

⁴Idea degli Esercizi dell' Oratorio istituiti da San Filippo Neri. 8vo. Venezia. 1766.

⁵Memorie degli Scrittori Filippini raccolte dal Marchese di Villarosa. 4to. Napoli. 1846.

tection of St Philip, differ from the exercise of the same virtues in any other Institute?

It has been remarked that in the great religious Orders there are Saints, each one of whom represents to his spiritual descendents a different kind of sanctity. There is a preacher, a missionary, a theologian, or a novice carried off in the first bloom of his religious life. Here are so many types upon which a religious may form himself according to the special bent of his character. But in the Congregation of the Oratory we do not find this variety.⁶ When St Philip was burning to go to the Indies, to preach the Gospel, in the hope of perhaps gaining the martyr's crown, it was revealed to him that his Indies were to be in Rome. The same is to be the case with his children. Wherever Providence may have placed them, there they are to remain, to do their appointed work, thee to live and die. It is a life singularly deficient in incident, and entirely devoid of all character of romance. There is to be but one type for the sons of St Philip. They are, each one of them, to seek to reproduce the life of their Father. The Excellences are to partake of the spirit of the Founder, to imitate his distinctive traits. Each virtue is to present itself steeped in his genius.

We have no need to enquire as to the existence of these Excellences. The Lives of the first companions of the Saint, Baronio, Tarugi, Ancina, Consolini, and in later times of the Blessed Sebastian Valfrè, sufficiently exemplify them.

The fact that they have produced fruit is attested by the numerous Oratories which during the course of three centuries sprang up and flourished throughout Italy, Spain and Portugal, Poland, Flanders; in the New World, in Mexico, Peru, Brazil, and in the Indies. That, in part, these no longer exist, proves nothing against the fervour, the piety, or the spirit of observance of their members. They have succumbed to the iniquitous laws which have prevailed in so many countries for well-nigh a century against the religious Orders, among which the Congregation of the Oratory has been improperly included.

The present work may interest those who care for ascetical literature; but there are two classes to whom it may especially appeal. Firstly, to those who by the mercy of God have been drawn to live in St Philip's house, to wear his habit and do his work. Secondly, to the more numerous class who have chosen the Apostle of Rome for their Father and

⁶The Spirit and Genius of St, Philip Neri, by Father Faber, p. 3.

guide, who frequent his churches and follow his exercises; and, above all, to the men and youths who have joined the Institution, which was the germ of the Congregation he was afterwards to found, and who under his banner live in the world and seek to sanctify themselves in the Brotherhood of the Little Oratory.

It has been deemed advisable to omit the portions at the conclusion of each Excellence specially addressed to persons living in the world. Their insertion would have materially increased the size of the work; moreover the direction adapted to persons living in the last century in a small provincial Italian town might have seemed ill-fitted for those to whom the work is now presented in an English form.

For the following notes on the author of the "Pregi," I am indebted to the kindness of Father Luigi Fornello of the Turin Oratory.

Father Francesco Antonio Agnelli, of the diocese of Saluzzo in Piedmont, entered the Congregation of the Oratory at Savigliano in 1704, and died in 1749, aged 81. His vocation came about under the following circumstances:— the anniversary of the consecration of the High Altar in the Church of the Oratory in that town dedicated to the Most Holy Name of Mary, was celebrated every year with peculiar pomp. It was when preaching the panegyric on this occasion that Father Agnelli, then canon and archpriest of the Cathedral of Saluzzo, was so attracted by the manner of life led by the Fathers of the Oratory that he resolved on giving up his position and entering the Congregation, in which he passed a most exemplary life during the space of forty-five years.

The manuscript of the "Pregi" came into the hands of the Fathers of the Chioggia Oratory, and was published by them in 1825.

The peculiar circumstances of our times give a certain character of opportuneness to the present publication. The hostility which in the present day unfortunately prevails to so great extent in many countries against the Church and her ministers, the malignity of the attacks upon her, and the persevering misrepresentations of the spirit and lives of the clergy, render unity in action on their part more than ever to be desired. The wish expressed by more than one of the members of the episcopate, and what is to us still more important, the desire of the bishops of our country, published in the Decrees of the Fourth Provincial Council of Westminster, held in 1873, to see the *Vita Communis* practised among the secular clergy, lead to the hope that further ac-

quaintance with the spirit of the Institute of St Philip may conduce to a gradual development of the Oratory, and that, as has been so often seen in its history, two or three priests agreeing to live together, and to observe the Rule, may in time come to form a new Congregation; and thus in many of our populous centres our holy Father may find new homes in which to do his own work of sanctification, through prayer, frequentation of the sacraments, and the daily word of God.

F.I.A.

THE ORATORY, LONDON

Feast of the B. Sebastian Valfrè, 1881.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I should not have embarked in so difficult an undertaking as this had I not been constrained thereto by obedience. About twelve years ago I had epitomised, on two sheets of paper, the twelve Excellences, which appeared to me to form in substance the genius of our Congregation of the Oratory, so as to put it before the novices, of whom I had then the charge, and to impress on them the true spirit of our great Father, St Philip Neri.

Some of our Fathers, and also several Fathers of other Congregations, especially Father Carlo Francesco Vazzolo of the Congregation of Fossano, who has now passed to a better life with the reputation of singular learning, prudence, and holiness, having seen these sheets, begged me to amplify and publish them. They were in hopes that such a work might be of use to all the Congregations of St Philip, and afford great light to postulants, who, being drawn by God to enter them, might thus learn to know our Institute beforehand, and not embrace it blindfold. But from the disinclination I have ever had to publishing, and the consciousness of my own unfitness, being burdened, moreover, with occupations, and perhaps also fearing the labour it would entail, I always resisted.

But at length, as I was talking one day at recreation with my Father Superior about works and publications, he suddenly turned to me and said that it was now time that I should apply myself to composing a book on the above-named Excellences, as he thought it would be for the glory of God and of advantage to many, especially to postulants. He said I must not delay, and he even gave me a scruple of conscience about it, using such forcible terms that they appeared to me to have the tenor of an absolute command. I then seemed to perceive a clear light in my soul, by which I discerned it to be the manifest will of God, made known to me by the mouth of the Superior who holds His place; and, unable to resist any longer, I promised to do so, and began without delay.

As I purpose to address persons of every capacity, I shall not treat of these matters in a lofty style, with subtle arguments of philosophy or speculative theology, but I shall content myself with writing in a

simple manner, armed only with solid reasons, with truths revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and with the examples and teaching of the Saints. As I am going to bring out the idea of the Congregation of the Oratory, so closely resembling that of the Apostolate, as I hope to show, I should fear lest, in using any other style, I might overstep Apostolic simplicity and act in opposition to the spirit of our holy Founder. He, in fact, enjoined in the book of his Rules, that his disciples in their sermons should take care to feed the minds of their hearers with really fruitful words, suited to the understanding even of the poor, without seeking the pomp of eloquence or the applause of the people. And I cannot but believe that it was his intention that in our writings also we should seek, not grandeur or over-refinement of style, but only the advantage of souls.

I know not how this work may succeed. This alone I know, that God uses things which are not as those which are; and since He has employed so weak an instrument as I am, I may hope that He designs to bring forth some good from it: and I may confidently hope it, because when we are guided by obedience we have nothing to fear; for if our own strength fails us, God will supply all that is needful.

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INTRODUCTION

The Divine Goodness, in establishing many and divers religious Orders in the Church, to serve as columns and precious gems to support and adorn it, has enriched them all with singular gifts and prerogatives. It has not, however, given to all the same Excellences, but, in its infinite wisdom, it has given to each one, according to its object, certain qualities proper to it, which distinguish it from the others. The Congregation of the Oratory (which has been canonically erected and approved by the Sovereign Pontiffs with marks of singular esteem and affection), although it is not a religious Order, since it has no vows, is still a body of ecclesiastics, living under the rule of their great Father, St Philip Neri, and under the obedience of a Superior, whom each house elects for itself, observing the customs begun by the Saint in the house of Rome. This constitutes it almost after the manner of a religious Order, and in such a way as to represent to the life the primitive Church; for, as among the early Christians there was continuous prayer, daily communion, and the daily Word of God preached by the Apostles, so also in the Congregation of the Oratory prayer is made at least twice ²⁷ a day; its priests, if not legitimately prevented, celebrate Holy Mass every day, and endeavour to foster among the laity the frequentation of the sacraments, according to the capacity of each; and every day they deliver the Word of God to the people in the form of a familiar discourse, preaching as many as four sermons daily where there is sufficient number of subjects, as was done in the Congregation of Rome during the lifetime of St Philip; or reducing them to two or three if there are fewer fathers, as in the Congregation of Naples, where they preach only two sermons daily on week-days.

Although it was born after so many eminent religious Orders, God has not failed to give to this Congregation, with a liberal and loving hand, many distinguished favours and prerogatives. These should be well considered by all the subjects of the Congregation, especially by the novices, in order that, being called to persevere in it, they may work profitably in its true spirit, and conceive the gratitude due to

²⁷The numbers in the margins indicate the page numbers of the 1881 edition.

the Giver of so great good, lest they should incur the displeasure of their holy Founder, who, although so gentle by nature, wished that he might be separated at the Day of Judgment from those of his sons who should have been ungrateful for the graces of God.

3 It is not my intention, in representing the Excellences of our holy Institute, to extol the Congregation of St Philip as more sublime and more highly privileged than the religious Orders; on the contrary, I confess that it has neither the name nor the essence of a religious Order, for the holy Father was not inspired by God to found it as such, and he contented himself that each house, in whatsoever place, embracing the rules prescribed by him in the first house of Rome, should form a separate community, entirely independent of all others.

This he did from the most just and holy motives. Firstly, because on account of his great humility, he did not wish to be called the founder of a religious Order; secondly, in order to be able to admit into his houses many of those who would not be accepted by religious Orders; for, as a rule, men enter young into religion, but on our Congregation men of mature age are accepted, and even those already weary of the world. All are not suited to the duties of the choir, all are not fitted to undergo long and rigorous fasts, vigils, and other austerities; and these do not exist in the Congregation of the Oratory, where the life is gentle, easy, and ordinary, and can be undertaken by those whose health and strength is only moderate. All are not capable of filling professorial chairs, and lecturing on philosophy, theology, and the sacred canons, or expounding the Holy Scriptures; and in our Congregation, although there are subjects of great talent and learning, still those who are admitted who are but moderately learned, provided they are fitted for the functions prescribed by the Institute, such as hearing confessions and preaching, and are not stubborn, but
4 humble and docile, and ready to undertake all the offices which may be assigned to them. All have not the courage to observe poverty, which is exacted in religious Orders by a solemn vow; but in place of this, our holy Father and Founder has willed that his children should indeed retain what they possess, but should live in his Congregation at their own expense, *visum est stipendiis propriis militare* ('it seemed good that they should serve at their own charge'; Inst., cap. 8), in order to detach them gently from money by obliging them to make a good use of it; that, not having the merit of the vow, they might have

that of voluntary detachment, and should not be recompensed in this life for their spiritual labours by living at the expense of others. And he desired that his sons, by means of an ever voluntary and generous detachment, should become more capable of imitating our Sovereign Master and Redeemer and His apostles in the contemplation of the Divine mysteries, so as to draw thence light and strength to combine the active with the contemplative life; for the union of these two is better than either of them taken separately.

In this manner St Philip has contributed to increase the beauty of Holy Church, whose praise it is to be “surrounded with variety,” by forming a community of men who, with all possible zeal, accompanied by great humility and simplicity in word and deed, imitating thus the Apostolic College, should labour for the glory of God and the good of their neighbour, actuated by love alone, unbound by vow or oath, and in every respect entirely free even until death. You may say that this is but a small company of volunteers compared with the disciplined forces of the religious bodies which sustain the Church with 5 so much strength and splendour; and you are right. But, although it may be a small band, it is still a reinforcement, and sometimes a small reinforcement arriving at the critical moment of the battle is worth the whole strength of the army by enabling it to gain a complete victory. And God Almighty, observing the profound humility and ardent zeal of St Philip, who desired that his sons should serve Him without any show and as it were in a hidden manner, has deigned to enrich his Congregation with the following twelve Excellences:—

- I. The exalted end of our vocation.
- II. Avoidance of ecclesiastical dignities.
- III. Charity.
- IV. Interior Mortification.
- V. Obedience.
- VI. Discretion and prudence in the government of the Congregation.
- VII. Esteem of virtue.

VIII. Detachment from possessions.

IX. Detachment from relations.

X. Chastity.

XI. The good name which the Congregation of the Oratory enjoys.

XII. The power of the Congregation to expel its subjects, and the freedom of subjects to leave it.

6 My design, therefore, in this work is not to laud our Congregation to the skies, for I should not even dare to place it on a level with any of the religious Orders, all of which I venerate as more worthy, and esteem more highly than our own Congregation; although I think I may be permitted to hold it in greater affection: this being the advice left us by the Venerable Father Mariano Sozzini, of the Congregation of the Oratory of Rome, namely, that the fathers should have the most esteem for the religious Orders, but the most love for their own Congregation. My object is, as I have said, to excite in its sons, my brothers, and especially in my novices, the gratitude they owe to God; to inspire them with due veneration and love for the Institute, in order to induce them to observe it with exactness, since upon this will depend their acquisition of perfection; and also to make known to those who are called by God to enter the Congregation, what is the nature of it, and what it requires from its subjects; that they may not hesitate for want of knowledge of it, but may appreciate the great good to which God deigns to call them, and may know that they can hope to become perfect and holy by following the dictates and examples of our holy Father, and by observing his rules, no less than by entering a religious Order.

7 For although our Congregation has not the austerities of cloistered religious, and is without the merit of vows, nevertheless, as our Cardinal Francesco Maria Tarugi frankly observed, by the daily public and private prayer, by the unwearied administration of the sacraments, and the continuous preaching of the Word of God, and especially by the hidden and effectual mortification of the interior man, as sublime virtues are practised in it as have ever been practised in any community whatsoever of monks or other ancient religious; for the holy Founder willed that with these his children should make up for the vows which

the most austere cloistered religious make, and the penances which they practise. And, moreover, the holy Father has inspired his subjects with such a spirit, that there is no great danger of these virtues leading them to pride, self-complacency, or affectation; because the constant abnegation of self-will so represses and keeps down human nature that it has not, so to speak, either time or room to be overtaken by spiritual vanity, so occupied is it in digesting the bitter food which it eats.

Nevertheless (and this is very wonderful), this spirit of interior mortification which so oppresses nature, subdues the intellect, and crushes self-love, does not occasion any melancholy or sadness, because it is the spirit of our vocation; but, on the contrary, it engenders joy, happiness, and a clear light, which shows us that walking thus step by step we walk securely, so that we may say with truth what the Apostle said, "And these things we write to you that you may rejoice, and your joy may be full."⁸ This spirit of joy which is found among us is very much admired by the religious Orders, and also by secular persons, who seeing our gentle ways, instead of so great rigour, are 8 the more easily drawn to virtue; and we shall see good reason why we should possess and cherish this spirit of joy, if we reflect attentively on the especial Excellences which the Lord in His goodness has granted to us.

⁸I John i. 4.

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST EXCELLENCE

THE EXALTED END OF OUR VOCATION

The higher the end of a work, the more beautiful and excellent is the work itself. I do not know what end can be found more sublime than the one to which the sons of St Philip are called; for their vocation consists in three things, the highest and holiest which adorn Holy Church: prayer, the administration of the sacraments, and feeding the people with the daily Word of God. Even the Apostles themselves were not called to a nobler end. In sending them forth to the whole world, our Saviour charged them, first, that they should be men of prayer;¹ secondly, that they should baptize men in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;² that they should loose penitent sinners from their sins;³ and also administer the other sacraments instituted by Him and left us as the remedy for our ills, the consolation of our sorrows, and the viaticum of eternal life; and, finally, that they should instruct all in the Divine mysteries, and preach His Holy Gospel in all parts of the world.⁴ 9 10

To these same three things of such importance and so great value are the priests of the Oratory called. St Philip, who was so given to prayer that he sometimes even prayed for forty consecutive hours, ardently desired, first of all, that his sons should be men of prayer. He obliged them to pray twice a day, in the morning before doing anything else, or, if then legitimately prevented by other occupations, at some other time during the day (Inst., cap. i.); and in the evening, at the Oratory, which prayer is common also to the laity who assemble there; and he wished that the Superior or confessor of the house should often exhort all to this holy exercise of prayer, that by this efficacious

¹ Luke xviii. 1.

² Matt. xxviii. 19.

³ Matt. xvi. 19.

⁴ Mark xvi. 15.

means they might always make progress in virtue. There can be no more sublime or honourable occupation for a man than this; as we see by the example of Moses, on whom speaking face to face with God conferred great honour and glory. Neither is there a more certain way to become a saint than to drink in prayer at the Fount of all sanctity, God himself.

11 "If I see," said St John Chrysostom, "a Christian or a religious tepid in prayer and making small account of it, I at once conjecture that he has little virtue and few gifts of God in his soul; but if I see him careful and diligent in prayer, I conclude at once that he is full of heavenly blessings." Our Father Manni, of the Congregation of Rome, writes that, during prayer, life is set in order, habits are rectified, and impurities washed away; for prayer cannot tolerate any stain upon the soul. And he used to say that St Philip wished that his Congregation should be called of the Oratory, in order that every one might understand that he who does not pray does not belong to his Congregation.

It does not enter into my plan to show what prayer is, nor how to make it. There are many books which treat of this, and it would be great temerity on my part if I were to pretend to teach that of which I perhaps do not know the very rudiments. I will not, however, refrain from suggesting certain instructions which the Saints have given, and which our first fathers, disciples themselves of our holy Founder, St Philip Neri, have left us; because they appear to me highly important.

I.

12 "Praying well," says St Gregory, "does not consist in composing fine phrases, but in continual bitter lamentations." Prayer, according to Father Balthazar Alvarez, of the Society of Jesus, a man of much experience, and confessor of St Teresa, who was declared by Holy Church to be a mistress in the art of prayer, consists solely in raising our spirit to God, and communicating to Him familiarly all our affairs, with a reverence and confidence surpassing that of the most cherished child towards its mother, and in treating of all things, great and small, both of heaven and earth, with our Lord and Master; opening our heart to Him unreservedly, emptying it entirely in His presence, leaving nothing behind; telling Him all our troubles, our sins, and our desires, and every other thing which may be in our soul; reposing with Him and

in Him, as with a friend in whom we confide, and to whom we reveal all things good and bad.

We must not go to prayer as if we were forced, but we must have an ardent desire of it; and whosoever has this desire despatches more business in one hour than others do in many. Nor does he give more time to other affairs than is absolutely necessary; but as soon as he is at leisure again he returns to his rest, which is treating and conversing with God. From this desire follows that of retirement when possible; for although Christ might have done in one hour what he did in forty days, He nevertheless wished to teach us that those who have familiar intercourse with His Divine Majesty, obtain it by communicating with Him at greater length, and by means of long retreats, in which the valiant prepare themselves for all that appertains to the service of God.

A great confidence and earnestness in asking God for all that is needful to us and to our neighbour is no less necessary; nor must we ever hesitate to ask Him for graces, since such hesitation is a temptation of the devil. When Father Alvarez was praying to God on behalf of some poor man, he received the following answer:—"Why art thou so reserved and limited in thy requests, when God is so ready and generous in giving?" And it was intimated to him that he should ask also 13 for other poor persons. St Teresa asked much and with confidence, and she declared that the real gate of the great graces which God had granted her had been prayer. And in order that prayer may be true, and availing, and pleasing to God, and heard by Him, it must be joined with mortification; for it is a common maxim of the saints that prayer without mortification is either subject to illusions or unlikely to last.

Our Father Consolini, however, although he highly esteemed this exercise, like every other son of St Philip, yet wished that we should not have an engrossing attachment to it, and that it should not interfere with works of charity and obedience, but for their sake should be promptly laid aside. Hearing one day that a father of the Congregation sometimes dispensed himself from some of the community actions, or from going down to the parlour when summoned, in order not to interrupt his cherished exercise, he reproved him with holy zeal, saying that he who would live in his own way is not suited to the Congregation, and that this was not the example set us by the holy Father, who would never have either time or place for himself. We may gather from this that not only obedience but also charity must always have

14 the first place in the Congregation; and that, when charity requires it, we must without any scruple interrupt our prayer; always supposing that the act of charity cannot be deferred to another season, because, in that case, it would be a great error to abandon prayer under this pretext, while we might do both the one and the other at their own time; and no one must be ready to deem a subject inobservant who is absent at the time of prayer, because he may be employed in works of charity which may perhaps be necessarily hidden, as, for instance, the prevention of some sin, or the consolation of some person in grievous temptation or affliction.

Nor was Father Consolini very fond of certain methods of prayer being rigorously prescribed; he loved to give the spirit liberty to choose the matter and method of prayer where and how we may best and most copiously obtain the fruit of prayer, which is the victory over our passions and the love of God.

Our holy Father also willed us to join vocal to mental prayer, making us recite, after the evening meditation in common, the Litanies of the Saints, with other prayers, and several Our Fathers and Hail Marys; and as we have not time to say the Divine Office every day in choir, on account of our daily sermons and other exercises, he has prescribed that we should at any rate sing Vespers in choir on Sundays and feast-days. He taught us, besides, many chaplets composed of ejaculations, of great profit to those who have used them, such as saying sixty-three times, *Virgin Mary, Mother of God, pray to Jesus for us*; and at the beginning of every decade, *Virgin and Mother, Mother and Virgin*.

II.

15 With regard to the administration of the sacraments, what nobler or greater honour can there be than to handle with our own hands the most Divine Sacrament, in which is the Body of Jesus Christ, and to distribute it to others? St Philip, in giving Holy Communion, was so full of fervour that his whole body was agitated, to the great wonder of all who saw him; and he sometimes trembled to such a degree that the consecrated particles were seen above the pyx, and yet never one fell, his face at the same time beaming like fire, so vehement was his devotion.

Though all our fathers are ready to give Holy Communion on every occasion, the Institute desires that on feasts, when the confessors are occupied in the confessional, those priests should give it who do not yet hear confessions, especially if they be novices; these should remain all the morning in the sacristy to be ready to fulfil this office. And, according to the example of our holy Father, they ought to perform this with all alacrity, at the first request, and with tender devotion; for experience proves that a reverent and devout manner of giving Holy Communion begets greater faith and devotion in him who receives it.

And what action can be more sublime than to administer the Sacrament of Penance and cleanse sinners from their sins? How great would be the honour conferred on a servant of the Crown to whom his Sovereign should say, "Go into such a province in rebellion against my authority; pardon in my name those who you think worthy; leave the others; I will punish them in due time"! This is our position; we have the power of absolving sinners in rebellion against God, and restoring them to the grace of God when we see them in proper dispositions. 16

And, moreover, what greater honour can there be than to guide sinners by this means to a state of perfection, besides absolving them from their sins? There is nothing of which God is more jealous than the care of those souls for whom Christ died, and therefore all religious and servants of God, and we especially who are called to the Congregation for this high end, should labour therein without stint, since this *impiorum est conversio peccatorum*, and I would add also, *est sanctificatio animarum*. [This is the conversion of impious sinners, and the sanctification of souls.] And, in fact, those give a great proof of their love of God who, to obey Him, voluntarily perform all those offices for their neighbour which charity demands, reckoning that what they give to their neighbour of self and of all they possess is given to God, since it is given for His sake. This consideration makes it appear sweet to them to serve others, to remain entire mornings and more in the confessional, to bear with their neighbour's ignorance and weaknesses, and in intercourse with him to become like soft and yielding wax; if offended by him, immediately to forgive him from their hearts, and to look kindly upon him, to speak gently to him, holding it for certain that as we act towards our neighbour, God will act towards us; if we are gentle, He will be gentle; if merciful, He will be merciful; if 17

rough, He will be rough; believing His word, that with the measure with which we mete out to others it shall be meted out to us. In this way they look upon the needs of their neighbour as precious mines by means of which they enrich their own souls, and make daily progress in perfection.

Great indeed must be the virtue of him who can apply himself to this exercise without being immoderately distracted by it; who can deal with the reprobate without losing his own soul; can hear of numberless corruptions without contracting stain; and can avoid bending the knee before the idols of self-interest, honour, worldliness, or vanity. And if great virtue be necessary not to lose our own souls, how much shall we not require to save our neighbour as well as ourselves? St Dionysius was right in saying that no one can safely be a teacher in Divine things, except under the following conditions:— the first is, that he must resemble God; the second that God Himself must have invited him to this lofty work; the third is, that when he is invited, he must not work carelessly. He will obtain this by prayer made in faith and confidence that God, who has Himself called him, will help him and will not suffer him to perish in an employment in which he has engaged at His command. But on his side he must be all vigilance, like those animals of Holy Scripture that were all eyes; keeping a strict guard over himself, giving no freedom to the eyes, no liberty to the tongue or hand, and never placing himself in dangerous occasions that he can possibly avoid, because it is through these that falls come, and not through those in which God Himself places us. It is also necessary after the ministry to examine what he has done, and in what he has failed, applying the chastisement and the remedy, in order to be more cautious in the future.

The principal virtues necessary to gain souls are prudence, courage, dexterity, sagacity, simplicity and purity of intention, gentleness, humility and sanctity of life, to attract souls by affability and good example: "Be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves."⁵ And Father Alvarez was wont to say that we ought to be such that those with whom we speak should be so changed that on leaving us they should strike their breasts, saying with the centurion watching Jesus on the Cross, "Indeed this was the Son of God."⁶

⁵Matt. x. 16.

⁶Matt. xxvii. 54.

The first maxim, nay, the very foundation of all others, in treating with men is to seek with the purest intention God alone, His glory and His holy pleasure, without regard to our own prejudice or temporal interests, without considering whether the persons with whom we have to deal be rich or poor, remembering that God alone sends them; and to act in such a manner that the penitents themselves may perceive that God alone and not human respect moves us to help and labour for them. The love due to our penitents must not be an imperfect love, blended with earthly considerations, but one of pure charity, and entirely spiritual, which causes us to love them, not for themselves, 19 but for God. Nor must we permit them to love us with this imperfect love; and therefore we must not appear moved by temporal interests, nor accept presents offered to us, so as not to curtail the holy freedom of the ministry. For the same reason we must not deprive them of their liberty of conscience, but allow them to go to any other confessor or spiritual father, from whom they may derive profit, provided that they do not do this out of levity, or curiosity, or any other human motive.

The subjects of the Congregation are fishers and not hunters of souls, therefore they must seek to gain them quietly and gently. A fisherman throws his net or hook in silence, and the fish knows not that it is sought until it is taken; the huntsman scours the country with loud cries and firearms, and his prey takes fright, flies, and if possible escapes and hides. We may compare missionaries to huntsmen, but a Philippine must content himself with being a fisherman, and leave the trade of hunting to those generous souls who are called thereto by God, with the exception of a few cases where the circumstances of the country require it. The Venerable Father Giuseppe Vaz was a Philippine and also a missionary, but the needs of the poor Indians called for it.

It was the desire of St Philip that we should fish for souls without imposing apparatus or any of those external signs which publicly set forth the end for which we labour, for these would frighten obstinate sinners, and would put them on their guard against us. He 20 wished us to hide our art of gaining souls in such a way as to attract the heart without frightening the sinner. Hence he would have no grave countenances, no rugged habit, no exterior penances, no silent solitude, no display of poverty, no missions and penitential processions, but joyousness, ordinary garb, kind manners, and nothing repelling.

Hence the exercises were to be popular and ordinary, not laborious or tedious, but rather a delightful and agreeable pastime. Hence the familiar sermons, the devout pilgrimages, the sacred music, and the homely conversations; and although he did ordain the discipline and silent prayer in his Oratory, he arranged that even this little austerity should be tempered by devout music.

There are many subjects in the Congregations of St Philip of great genius and talent who may be tempted to go forth out of their proper sphere. The ministry of hearing confessions and preaching may seem to them contemptible and of very limited profit; but if they do not humble themselves they run great danger of leaving the Congregation and of working immense injury both to themselves and others by their pride and ambition.

21 The wish to do too much without the balance of great prudence and discretion has always been the stumbling block of active and fervid minds in the Congregation. It is a delusion to try to imitate the burning zeal of our holy Father without taking care to imitate also his prudence, kindness, and gentleness. A subject who in his first fervour loads himself with many burdens resembles a traveller who sets out with heavy bundles on his shoulders, feeling at first that he has plenty of strength to carry them, but when he has gone a short way he is forced to stop and lay them down and leave them by the roadside, either wholly or in part. Fervour is not a permanent gift, but the undertakings he has assumed are permanent; hence it follows that he loses his peace, wears out his strength and health, and if he would continue his journey he must travel slowly, and do less than the others who gave themselves to the service of their neighbour with moderation and discretion.

We must be persuaded that the best evangelical labourer is not the one who attracts the most penitents, but he who without neglecting himself is the means of most profit to his penitents, although they be fewer. We must, therefore, devote ourselves to making them advance, chiefly by persuading them to practise self-denial and mortification of their passions, by exhorting them to overcome themselves in those things to which they feel the greatest repugnance and abhorrence, to cut short all useless conversations, visits, compliments, and fashions, conforming themselves in everything to the humility and modesty proper to their condition in life, and above all teaching them

to be very patient and silent when occasions offer of humiliation and contempt.

Moreover, we must fear the strict account we shall have to render, not only of the defects into which those under our direction may fall through our carelessness, but also the account which will be required 22 from us of the virtues we have failed to teach them. Lastly, I will add the motives which our Venerable Father Mariano Sozzini suggested to his spiritual children in order to make them greatly love and esteem this ministry.

1. That this exercise is the will of God for us and our clear vocation.
2. That we shall consequently find therein the help of God and our own merits.
3. That both in its nature and object the ministry is most noble and attractive, being for the honour of God and the good of our neighbour.
4. That this was the chief delight of our holy Father.

III.

The third and highest work to which we are called is to feed the faithful with the daily Word of God. And what is there more noble than that we should be the ambassadors of God to souls created by Him and destined to be one day the princes of heaven, and that we should act as teachers to the very sons of God? It is the work of an apostle, and there can be none more exalted. It is true that to fill this apostolic ministry, learning is first of all necessary; but it must be united with spirituality, because learning and spirituality, according to Father Alvarez, are the two sisters, Martha and Mary, who mutually help one another. For learning, which brings with it many and various causes of distraction, 23 has need of spirituality to assist it in many ways.

In the first place, it gives us authority. St Gregory says that, when a man's life is despised, his doctrine is held of little account; while, on the other hand, that man's doctrine is much esteemed whose life is edifying and admired. The authority of teaching, says St Peter Chrysologus, consists in a good life; and he who practises what he teaches

makes his hearers practise it also. On the contrary, a bad and imperfect life discredits both the master and his doctrine, the preacher and his preaching; for, says St Bernard, when the life of him who preaches is blameworthy, neither his words nor his teaching can be approved.

In the second place, spirituality also gives us life; since, as the Apostle says, "the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth;"⁷ "knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth;"⁸ and woe to the knowledge, adds St Augustine, which is not directed by charity. And David said to the Lord, "Teach me goodness, and discipline, and knowledge;"⁹ but first of all goodness.

24 In the third place, it gives us efficacy in persuading others that what we teach is possible, because doctrine heard and not witnessed is learned with difficulty, but if seen in practice it is learned easily and at once. Wherefore, the Apostle says to St Timothy, "Take heed to thyself and to doctrine; be earnest in them. For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."¹⁰

In the fourth place, it gives us firmness, constancy, and perseverance in teaching, because, if the spirit is weak, the flesh grows weary and the strength fails. This brings us to another reason why spirituality greatly helps us to advance in learning, namely, that purity of life, according to Cassian, opens the eye with which we see God; and from that eye, from which God does not hide Himself, He will not hide His treasures, His secrets, and the clear and limpid sense of the Holy Scriptures, as the Abbot Theodore, St Thomas, St Bonaventure, and others have experienced.

Prayer helps us in this, since we do not learn less by prayer than by study. Mortification helps us by exercising us in overcoming the weariness of studying at the appointed times; in conquering our repugnance to humble ourselves by asking questions of others, whether masters or fellow-students, young or old, or less learned; in refraining from the study of things higher than are fitting for us, or contrary to our profession, led by curiosity rather than seeking what is profitable.

Obedience also helps us by making us attend to those studies only which superiors impose, or fulfil those employments in which they

⁷ 2 Cor. iii. 6.

⁸ 1 Cor. viii. 1.

⁹ Ps. cxviii. 66

¹⁰ 1 Tim. iv. 16.

place us. Our Venerable Father Magnanti, of the Oratory of Aquila, a great servant of God, speaking of himself, but through humility withholding his name, wrote to a nun as follows:—

“I know from a person to whom it happened, that in a time of pestilence, when he wished to go and preach to the poor plague-stricken creatures, to hear their confessions, and to pray with them, 25 his superiors sent him, with other young fathers, out of the city, in order to preserve his life, and employed him in cooking and in turning the spit; and our Lord communicated to him greater lights and graces and intelligence of the Holy Scriptures than he had ever acquired in all the studies he had made with great labour during many years; the Divine Majesty thus proving to him that to fill an office through obedience, though it be lowly and of small account, is worth more than all the learning acquired from books.”

Each of us must, therefore, attend first of all to his own progress, in order to teach others how to make progress. Oh, how many study for others, but not for themselves! What avails it to fill your memory and papers with wise sayings and solid truths, and yet to have your soul empty of virtue? Those who seek only learning and do not care for spirituality may be compared to badly fed horses drawing a wagon-load of corn, who are unable to drag forth the cart when it sticks in the mire because they are not fed upon the oats with which the cart they are drawing is laden. Thus many masters of spirituality and great preachers are weak in spirit, and do not advance at all in perfection, because, although their intellect is full of spiritual truths which they teach and preach to others, they neither feed upon them nor ponder them, nor apply them to themselves in meditation, in order to move their hearts to a fervent and perfect reform of their lives. And we see by experience that men of learning without spirituality do much harm 26 to the Church of God, whilst men of learning and piety according to the heart of God, are the pillars of the Church. Reflecting on this, St Teresa used to say, *That he who preaches produces sometimes little fruit because he has too much talent; it would be better if he had more fire of the love of God.* And our Father Francesco Maria Tarugi, who from his great eloquence and the abundant fruit which he produced in his hearers, was called *dux verbi* [leader of the Word], used to say, *The word which issues forth from the mouth reaches to the ear; the word which comes from the heart does not stop until it reaches another heart.* How

clearly this shows the necessity of spirituality in him who has to preach to the people, and that learning alone is not sufficient!

27 A priest of the Oratory, therefore, who is obliged by his vocation to preach continually to the people, if he would feed them well and fittingly, must, in the first place, pray a great deal: he must humble himself before God through the knowledge of his own nothingness and vileness; he must be filled with shame and confusion for his unworthiness of the sublime and important charge which he exercises, and must ask from God the spirit necessary for this ministry, with a full confidence of obtaining it, because this is an office laid upon him by God, who has promised in His goodness "to give it to them that ask Him."¹¹ Moreover, he must have the purest intention in his studies, seeking nothing but the glory of God, and to become a useful instrument in making Him known, served and loved by men. He must also guard against too great eagerness in study and the consequent hurry in other things, because this is a source of great evils, causing good works to be carelessly done through haste, and the heart to be unfit to pray and to treat with God. And finally, he must give the best of his time to spiritual things, in order to do them perfectly and give them the first place, being fully persuaded that his learning will not suffer on this account: according to that saying of St Bonaventure, "Learning, which is put after virtue, is best acquired by means of virtue."

IV.

After the careful endeavour to acquire spirituality, every subject of the Congregation who is destined to preach the Word of God, must devote himself to the most diligent study of the Sacred Scriptures, the holy Fathers, the lives of the Saints, and other suitable books, particularly those which are not merely learned, but devout and solid, tending to make a Christian perfect; for St Philip used to say, Read always the books which begin with S.; that is to say, either written by Saints or lives of Saints.

28 It was a maxim of Father Consolini, that great master of spirituality, that our principal resources in composing sermons should be the Spirit of God, and a well-grounded knowledge of Holy Scripture, the sacred commentators, and the lives of the Saints; if we are thus provided, sermons are more easy to him who preaches them, and more

¹¹Luke xi. 13.

useful and fruitful to those who hear them. For this end he required in subjects who were to preach, a great confidence in God, moderate study, the use of good books, that is of the Saints, and entire obedience, not only to the Provost, but also to the Prefect whose office it is to prepare the list of sermons; being ready to preach at the times they appoint, and also to terminate the sermon at the sound of the bell which gives the signal for it. Above all, we must take care, he added, to practise what we preach, if we wish others to execute what they hear. Thus did Jesus Christ, who "began to do and to teach."¹²

Sermons should be composed with due attention, not to making them beautiful, but solid and judicious, and it is especially necessary to arrange them in proper order. St Francis Borgia, of the Society of Jesus, in the short but excellent treatise which he wrote for preachers, warns them not to put things in a place which does not suit them, assuring them that even beautiful and good things, which in their proper and natural position are pleasing and profitable, will, if displaced, no longer have any beauty, not in any way move the hearers.

It is a good and prudent thing to write out sermons, for they may serve as provision for future days, when there will not be much time to compose new ones. Some, however, do not write, because they have a natural facility in speaking, and moreover speak well extempore; but this is a gift which few possess, and those only, who either have read 29 much, and are also endowed with talent and a good memory, or those who have prayed much. Others do not write because it gives them too much trouble. But if they are not men of prayer and unusually learned, their sermons, as a rule, do not succeed in pleasing, still less in converting. Some write them out shortly, noting down only the points, or the most important sentences, and this may answer for those who are naturally eloquent. Others, again, write them out at length, and do not utter a word which has not been first written down and learnt by heart; this however is very laborious, and is more suited to timid beginners than to experienced preachers. And this adherence to the very words deprives a preacher in great measure of the necessary vehemence and fervour of spirit, which those retain who are not so bound to studied words; and this appears to me the best.

The language must be neither affected nor too polished, because this weakens the arguments we employ. The words must be such as all

¹² Acts i. 1.

may understand, and should a word escape you which you suspect will not be understood by all, you should immediately correct and change it; as did one of our fathers at Rome, who having used the word “metamorphosis” immediately corrected himself and changed it. Nevertheless the preacher must take care not to utter and vulgar, unusual, or ridiculous expressions; and above all his language must be very pure, so as not to open the door to any low, worldly, or unchaste thought:

30 “The words of the Lord are pure words.”¹³ In speaking from the pulpit we must, according to our holy rule, use a flowing and familiar style, plainly intelligible to all, and without vanity or pomp, so that it may produce fruit in the hearers; and it should be chiefly confirmed by the examples of the Saints and approved historical works (Inst., cap. 3).

It would be a good plan for the preacher, and also very profitable to his audience, if each time he were to revolve in his mind during prayer what he has to say in his sermon, and pray much to God that He would deign to move the hearts of his hearers, to convert them thoroughly, and to draw them to virtue; since we of ourselves are nothing else but “sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.”¹⁴ He might also procure the help of God, by reciting before his sermon some vocal prayer, as, for instance, the *Veni Creator*, or the Litanies of the Blessed Virgin; and the sermon ended, he must not forget to give the thanks due to God for the assistance given him in this ministry, and for whatever success the sermon may have had, and to pray anew for the profit of his hearers. He must not be disturbed when he sees a small audience, but should discourse with the same zeal, energy, and courage, as if it were very large; remembering that Jesus Christ preached sometimes to a small number of disciples, and now and then to only one woman; and St Francis of Sales considered his labours well spent in preaching to only seven people.

31 He must always speak with great esteem for his hearers, but at the same time he must combat vices with apostolic freedom, and those especially which prevail where he is preaching, since God said to the prophet Isaias, “Show My people their wicked doings;”¹⁵ for sinners are more easily led to amend their lives when, after having heard the maxims of eternal truth, they see themselves depicted by the priests

¹³Ps. xi. 7.

¹⁴I Cor. xiii. 1.

¹⁵Isa. lviii. 1.

just as they are, and their own sins held up before them as if face to face, and the malice with which they commit them. And while a confessor should win his penitents by gentleness and compassion (except in the case of women, with whom, unless they are in extreme affliction, his words should be a little harsh, so as to avoid all possible danger, according to the advice and example of St Philip), a preacher should be stern in inveighing against sin. He may be gentle when he is trying to urge men on to virtue, and fire their souls with the love of God; but when he declaims against their faults, he must do so with warmth, which, however, must show zeal and not indignation, charity and compassion, rather than impatience and anger. He may enter into detail about those sins which are commonly committed, with forcible and earnest words indeed, but always speaking in general and with circumspection, so that no one may have reason to take offence. Above all, let him labour to move sinners to sorrow for their sins, and to penance, because the Lord declared those to be false prophets who did not preach penance.¹⁶

When the sermon is ended, and he has given thanks to God, as 32
I have said, that He has been pleased to make use of him for so honourable an employment, the preacher should humble himself if, while reproving certain faults in others, he still finds them in himself; or if, while speaking of virtues and evangelical perfection, he may yet be far from possessing them. If he hears himself praised, or it is said that his sermons are good and fruitful, let him refer all immediately to God, the sole author of all good, and say with the most humble Virgin, "My soul doth magnify the Lord;" "To God alone honour and glory;" "To Thee glory, to me confusion." If again he be told that he has produced no fruit, let him not be disturbed, nor lose courage, provided he has done his part; for it may be that God has in secret produced more fruit than is thought, and that the seed he has sown will bring forth an abundant harvest in due season. It is related of St James the Apostle that his preaching in Spain converted very few at the time, but that later the fruit of his labours was seen to be most abundant and permanent.

The holy Father was so afraid that his sons should allow themselves to be carried away by vainglory in this ministry, that one day while Father Francesco Maria Tarugi, who from his talent and vigour

¹⁶Lam. Jer. ii. 14.

33 in preaching was, as we have already said, called *dux verbi*, was enlarging in the pulpit on the great advantage and utility of suffering for the love of God, St Philip, who happened to be present, perceiving the universal applause of the audience, and fearing lest Father Tarugi might take pride in it, commenced agitating himself with his usual movements, and standing up, struck a column with his hand, drawing on himself the eyes of all, and continued doing so until the sermon was concluded; then, going up into the place of Tarugi, he exclaimed with a loud voice, that none of the Congregation had any occasion for vainglory or pride, since up to that hour, no one of them had shed a drop of his blood for Christ, but on the contrary, from following and serving Him, they had gained, and continued to gain, honour and respect; and he dilated very much on this subject, to the great edification of his hearers.

It appears that, through the mercy of God, this fear of vainglory and abhorrence of all human praise and applause which possessed St Philip, has been inherited by his sons, and there is no great danger of their praising one another for their sermons; for it has passed into a proverb amongst us that the preacher receives at recreation the alms which he had not collected after the sermon, as is usually done by other preachers, either for the poor or for themselves. This custom is forbidden by our rule, and among us this alms consists in the preacher hearing in jest and mockery, not his own praises, but, on the contrary, the defects which have been remarked in his sermon. And all this helps wonderfully to banish every temptation to vainglory.

34 In addition to the sermons which we daily preach in church, and the one which is preached every Sunday in the Little Oratory to the brothers of the same; on all feasts after Vespers and the usual sermon are over, the Prefect of the Oratory with some of the fathers, goes out with the brothers of the Oratory and those who may wish to join them, to some country-house, where, seated on grass, they listened to some sacred music; afterwards a boy makes a little discourse composed for him by the Prefect and committed to memory; and as soon as it is finished, the musicians sing again. Then the Father Prefect, or some other father in his place, preaches, he also invites a third to do likewise, and even a fourth if time permits; all with brief but cogent arguments seeking to benefit souls; and the whole ends with music.¹⁷

¹⁷The method of conducting the exercises as described in the text has not been

The same exercises take place from the beginning of November up to Easter, in the Little Oratory; where it is also the custom to sing the Litanies of our Blessed Lady, or to have some devout representations by boys, or some choice sacred music, as may be seen in the appendix to the rule.

No one would believe how acceptable these holy exercises have always proved wherever they have been practised, and if they are not practised in every Congregation, the reason is either the scarcity of subjects or want of money for the expense of the music. The fruit derived from these holy functions is also incredible; and if there were no other than the prevention of the many sins and idle conversations which take place on feast-days, this alone would be no little good. From these saintly and ingenious contrivances of our holy Father St Philip, we clearly see how he strove to renew in Christendom the times of the Apostles, by introducing anew the daily and frequent Word of God, as being necessary for the maintenance of faith and innocence, for the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of souls. So necessary, indeed, is it that St Augustine, the illustrious doctor of the Church, did not hesitate to prefer it even to the Communion of the Most Holy Body of Jesus Christ: *Licet prædicatio Corpore Christi minor in dignitate, eam tamen recipientibus major est efficiendi potestate* [Although preaching is of lesser worth than the Body of Christ, yet in the power it has to affect those who receive it, it is greater]. 35

God has often honoured the familiar sermons of the Oratory with singular demonstrations of His good pleasure, either by withholding rain during their continuance, or by rendering the voice of the preacher audible at a great distance and to an immense multitude, or by lending such vigour to it as to make it appear the very trump of the Last Judgment, penetrating the depths of the hearts of the hearers, and working stupendous conversions. The Venerable Father Mariano Sozzini testifies that he was many times cured of fever by going up the steps of the pulpit to preach; and some of the fathers have been seen during their sermons with rays of light shining forth from their faces, or flames darting from their lips, or with a crown of light around their brows, or a brilliant cloud above their heads in which the Queen of Heaven and her Divine Infant were visible, or raised in ecstasy from 36

strictly adhered to in England, where only one sermon is usually preached.

the ground in the very act of preaching.¹⁸

The testimonies in favour of the music employed in the Oratory are of no less weight. In the year 1622, during the usual evening Oratory at Rome, the preacher, who was a Capuchin, turned at the end of his sermon towards the image of the Saint above the altar, imploring him to bless the Congregation and the numerous audience; and a Capuchin lay-brother, who was much esteemed for his sanctity, beheld our holy Father raise his arm and give the benediction required. Pope Gregory XV., who heard of the event, ordered that the miraculous image should be preserved with care.

37 In Florence, in the year 1632, one end of the Oratory took fire, and the beam that supported the musicians' gallery was already in flames. The Venerable Father Bini, the founder of that Congregation, who was praying there, perceived it; and, thinking this might be a warning from God that the musical oratories lately introduced were not pleasing to Him, he said: "O Lord! If this music is not to thy service, let this beam be destroyed; but if Thou dost wish it to be continued, Thou knowest how to sustain it." And the servant of God continued his prayer for the rest of the night in perfect peace. Next morning, the other fathers became aware of the fire and hastened to extinguish it. To their surprise they found a triple prodigy had occurred, namely, that the beam, although burning the whole night, was not yet consumed; that the flames had not damaged the slightest portion of the gallery, and that the beam itself still supported it, although it was too slender to do so after being so much burnt away. Hence they recognized that God designed by this portent to show them that it was His will the use of music in the Oratory should be continued.

On the other hand, the chastisements with which God had visited those who have opposed or even spoken against the Oratory have been

¹⁸The fervour of those who first frequented the Oratory was so great that a week seldom passed without one or two entering some religious Order. These were accustomed, when the exercises were over, to ask the prayers of the fathers and brothers for their perseverance in the state of life they were about to embrace. This was not the effects of the words of the Saint alone; those of his disciples and sons in every city have been most fruitful. After one sermon of Father Baronio three young cavaliers and one prelate abandoned the world; and four students of the University of Valencia went together to the barefooted friars of St Francis to embrace that Institute, moved by one sermon of Father Arbuxech. In the province of Abruzzo alone more than fifty were induced by Father Talpa to enter the Order of Preachers; and twelve persons at once bid adieu to the world through the preaching of Father Santolini.

terrible and severe; violent and sudden deaths having in many cases been the immediate portion of those who have ventured to oppose this work of God.

In Grenada a lawyer spoke satirically of the Oratory, and a few days after he was struck by a mortal illness which inflamed his mouth so that it seemed on fire, and of which he died; and all confessed that the Divine justice had punished his tongue for his misuse of it in persecuting the fathers of the Oratory.

In 1720 some inhabitants of Castoreale in Sicily tried to turn the fathers of the Oratory out of their house, but they suffered so many grave and unforeseen disasters that they repented and left them undisturbed. A lawyer of Murazzano in Piedmont opposed the foundation of the Oratory in that place, and he was at once seized with such profound melancholy that he was entirely unable to sleep. The doctors tried to discover some cause for it, but he, attributing it to his opposition to the Oratory, wrote to withdraw it and was instantly cured, as he testified on oath. 38

In Lisbon, a person who had spoken against the Venerable Father de Quental was struck by apoplexy a few hours later, which disfigured his face and thrust his tongue, all black and swollen, out of his mouth, and in this state he died, to the terror of those around. The same thing happened in Mexico, where a man who had mocked at one of the sermons at the Oratory had a terrible visitation. His mouth changed its place in a horrible manner, his tongue swelled, and he died before he had time to make his confession as he desired. The body of another who had insulted one of the fathers became covered with sores and he died miserably.

Many other examples might be given even down to our own day, but these are enough to strike fear into those who have the temerity to despise the exercises introduced by the Saint under Divine inspiration, and to excite in our fathers and brothers sentiments of pity and compassion for those who insult or deride them.

In closing this paragraph, I remember some advice that I wished to give to preachers which I forgot to mention in its proper place, and it is this: When one of our fathers has to preach the panegyric of some Saint, he may—nay, he ought to do so in a style more ornate and elegant, but always intelligible and clear; at the same time he must take care not to put himself and his own talents forward, but to display the 39

heroic actions of the Saint, and, in so far as possible, his whole life. Although he should not then preach a moral discourse, he may still introduce by the way some little word or sentence calculated to make a salutary impression; and at the end of the panegyric let him not fail to make a short exhortation in keeping with his subject, even though it be only ten or twelve lines. The Venerable Father Valfrè, of the Congregation of Turin, gave me this advice when he heard my panegyric of St Francis of Sales, which had been without this ornament, and from that time forward I have always followed it with satisfaction. I know that one of our fathers by doing this so touched the heart of a gentleman who heard him, that he said this panegyric had done his soul more good than if he had heard a whole Lenten course of sermons, so greatly was he moved to compunction; and I think that if a person hears some good and penetrating maxim after he has seen in the life of a Saint the exact opposite of his own bad or tepid life, it is natural that he should be led to make an entire change. And thus, if panegyrics of the Saints are well and properly made, they will not be useless, but, on the contrary, most beneficial to the Church and to the hearers.

V.

After having shown how high is our vocation to the Congregation of the Oratory, since it obliges us to be men of prayer, always ready to administer the sacraments, principally that of confession, and indefatigable in instructing and helping souls with the continuous Word of God, I deem it well to show also how high and worthy of all esteem this vocation is, on account of the rules of our Institute, which all tend to make us practise, not merely ordinary devotions, but the most solid virtues, and in a very skilful and sublime manner; for all breathes hiddenness, humility, and interior mortification—all, in substance, are founded on those three fundamental maxims laid down by our Lord Jesus Christ in His Gospel: humility, *Discite a me, quia mitis sum, et humilis corde*;¹⁹ abnegation of our own will, *Abneget semetipsum*;²⁰ and the carrying each one of us our cross, *Tollat crucem suam*. [Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart; Let him deny himself, and take up his cross.]

¹⁹Matt. xi. 29.

²⁰Matt. xvi. 24.

The first of these three, humility, we find in nearly all our rules and customs; for no one of us is there any title of honour. The Superior alone receives the title of reverend in the lists, or in the decrees which are written in the books; in the house he is never called by any name but that of Father, and nothing more. In the other offices I know not what honour is to be found, since all have their own burthen, and none carry with them any temporal emolument, and each official is subject 41 to another in such wise that even the first Deputy, the Secretary, the Minister, the Prefect of the novices, and the others, nay, even the Superior himself, must all obey, when occasion requires, the Prefect of preachers, the Sacristan, the porter, or the cook. No one, however old in the Congregation, disdains to do those things which the clerics, the novices, or the lay-brothers themselves do, such as serving Mass, sweeping the church, preparing the altars, lighting the candles, carrying torches, the cross, the thurible, and similar things. At table there is no difference of food; all is alike and equal from the Superior to the cook. In the room assigned for recreation there is no place reserved for anyone, not even for the Superior; each one seats himself where he pleases. It is only at table, in congregations, and in the functions at church, that the Superior has the first place, and the others according to seniority, for the sake of order and to avoid confusion and useless ceremony. When the Superior and the Deputies, who are the first officials, and who assist the Father in the government of the house, have terminated their triennium, they remain what they were previously, without the smallest exemption or privilege. All try to be beforehand in showing honour to one another: *Se invicem honore praevenientes, et sibi invicem obsequentes* ('Anticipating each other in respect, and serving each other'; Inst., cap. 9). And it is held to be a great error for us to use too familiar terms towards one another, which detract from the mutual respect we owe to each other. 42

In our Congregation there are no titles of distinction, no doctorships, nor professorial chairs; and although, when required, we have schools of philosophy and dogmatic and moral theology for our subjects, they are held in a humble manner, because we should all try to live hidden and unknown: *Amare nesciri* [love to be unknown], according to the important advice of the holy Father.

And this *amare nesciri* obliges us to practise not merely exterior, but still more, interior humility. The exterior humiliations prescribed

to us, although good and holy, if we do not take the greatest care, may sometimes foment our pride, because we know that the world esteems these humiliations as signs of humility; for our self-love is so subtle that it seeks for esteem even when it appears to seek only contempt. But if we accept with prompt resignation those humiliations which happen to us by chance, now in one way, now in another, against our will, it is a certain sign of true humility, provided, however, that we accept them without any display, and without showing our good intention, except when it is a case of avoiding scandal. Voluntary humiliations, sought out for ourselves, may be dictated by hypocrisy; involuntary ones, sent us by Divine Providence, can sanctify us, if borne with patience. For instance, giving up to another, of our own accord, the first place which, according to the rules of the world, would be due to ourselves by station or age; not contradicting the opinion of another; refusing with a good grace an honourable office, and contenting ourselves with a lower one. If these and similar humiliations are at the same time accepted by the heart, they are most excellent; but if they are practised in order to gain esteem and the character of being humble, or what use are they? Of none at all, except to make us appear in the sight of God proud and deceitful, as we are. But to practise these humiliations in such a way that no one may perceive we do them out of humility, ah! these are, indeed, true humiliations; this is truly the *amare nesciri*, the humility of one who *vult vilis haberi, non humilis reputari* [who wishes to be accounted vile, not to have a reputation for humility].

This was the true spirit of humility possessed in the highest degree by our holy Father St Philip, who so well understood how to hide his continual humiliations, that for many years, under the vigilant eyes of all Rome, his most subtle acts of humility were deemed mere madness; and such judgments filled him with joy.

Father Consolini, his beloved disciple, so carefully concealed all his virtues, and especially his humility, that his novices, notwithstanding all their attempts, never succeeded in discovering the extent of their perfection; nor could they say anything of him but that he was a saint who concealed his sanctity with much adroitness.

The fathers of the Congregation of Turin admired above all in their Venerable Father Valfrè the art with which he kept himself and his deep humility hidden; and our Father Giuseppe Varda was also

greatly struck by this, for being his intimate friend he went several times from Savigliano to Turin simply to learn something from Father Valfrè, whom he venerated as a saint; and notwithstanding his clear 44 discernment, being a priest of singular virtue, he confessed that there was no means of discovering anything in this man, so well did he contrive to conceal himself. He refused the Archbishopric of Turin offered him by his King, Victor Amadeus II.; and at court he performed many acts of great humility, but with such art that they did not appear to be humility. And this should be precisely the true spirit of the sons of St Philip, to be virtuous and humble without appearing so.

VI.

With regard to the second maxim, the renouncement of our own will, this may be said to be continual. In addition to the mortifications which the Superior studies to give to his subjects from time to time, as well as the Prefect to his novices and the Minister to the brothers, in order to make them advance in virtue, how many does not each father encounter unexpectedly in the course of the day? He may intend to go out of the city, or to take a walk to get some fresh air, or to do some business, and he will have to remain at home for some service of the community—to assist at a Congregation, or to supply the place of some one who is absent, to serve, or read, or propose the accustomed doubts at table, or similar things which are quite unforeseen. He may be occupied in composing a sermon, or in writing a letter, and he will perhaps be interrupted four, six, nay ten times in one morning by 45 being called to the confessional or the parlours. Some one hour may suit him for saying Mass, and he will be put down at another very inconvenient one, &c. But as I am going to speak more fully on this point, I merely mention it here to show how our rules are founded and depend upon this maxim of renunciation of self-will.

VII.

With regard to the third maxim, that each one should carry his cross; besides those which God is wont to send to whom He will, and above all to His friends, because the cross is the ladder to heaven; our offices are crosses for each subject to whom they are assigned by the Congregation; and as long as life lasts no one is left without some office, unless illness renders him incapable of work. This cross is, therefore, a perpetual one. There is no office which carries with it a shadow of honour or other temporal advantage. The office of Provost alone seems honourable, because he is the head of the house and is destined to govern and command; but he really carries the greatest cross of all, not only because, being obliged to set a good example, he must take care to be the first and the most exact of all in the observance of the rules and in all the functions of the Congregation, as far as he can, and is not prevented by this very office, but also because he is obliged to remain more at home to watch over the house, to issue the necessary
46 orders, to listen to those who come to him, and to give the various permissions required, so that he may be said to be the servant of all. And he must keep a careful watch over himself if he wishes to succeed in ruling subjects who are free. The Superior of a community of religious may send to another house a subject who does not please him because he fails in his duty; but the Provost of our Congregation cannot make any subject change his abode, or go to another house of St Philip, but must bear with him such as he is; and although he may exact due obedience from him, and may correct, admonish, and mortify him if necessary, he ought not lightly to occasion him to be tempted to leave the Congregation, and abandon it for every trifling reason; hence he has need of great prudence and patience, as we shall see more fully in the chapter on prudence and discretion in government. And, in the meantime, it is a great cross for a poor Superior to be troubled by doubts as to whether he would do well to mortify some subject who fails in his duty, or whether, owing to his little virtue, this might occasion him some great temptation; whether he would betray his conscience in not punishing him, or whether it would be more judicious to pass it over. On the one hand, his zeal will suggest remedies; on the other, his loving and paternal heart will fear to disgust a subject without any profit. Ah, how often does he not find himself in this plight! And then he has no other advantage over the rest but

the power of giving a piece of gold every month to the poor, and of causing five Paters and Aves to be said every evening in the Oratory 47 for his intention, as Father Valfrè wittily wrote to Father Rosa, Provost of the Congregation of Mondovì.

It might also appear as if the Deputies had some sort of honour, since they are considered as the pillars of the Congregation, because they assist the Provost in its government; but after all, they have in reality no other advantage but that of being frequently engaged in Congregations with the Father, and consequently much disturbed. The Father Minister has charge of the brothers, and it is no easy matter to direct to perfection rough persons without education—as our lay-brothers sometimes are, who perhaps hardly know how to read—and to regulate all their occupations and labours in the variety of offices required for the service of the Congregation. In addition to this, he must provide all that is wanted for the house, and all the food for the community; and it is no small trouble to strive, as he ought, to content all as far as possible, without introducing or allowing singularities, and to write down minutely all that he spends, so as to give an account of it at the end of the year. The Prefect of novices also has his cross, and that not a light one, since he must nourish the subjects confided to him with the milk of true piety and the peculiar spirit of St Philip. The Masters of novices in religious Orders know well what pains it costs them to train the youths committed to their care, but they have to bring up tender plants whom they can easily bend as they will, for they generally enter at the early age of sixteen or thereabouts. But 48 our Prefects of Novice-masters have to undertake the charge of young shrubs already strong and robust, whom it is more difficult to bend, since they for the most part enter as priests, men already formed, and of every age. Nevertheless all their endeavour must be to render them pliable and docile in everything, as our holy Father wished. Nor is the burden any lighter which is imposed on the Prefect of the Oratory, or the Prefect of Preachers, or the Father Sacristan; indeed we may say of all the offices that they bring nought else but care and anxiety, and no shadow of honour or temporal gain; and this cross, which is to be found in every office, cannot be refused without legitimate cause, as we shall say elsewhere.

VIII.

From what has been said, we may well conclude how exalted is the end of our vocation, since it makes us practise the three most sublime things which Holy Church exercises, and observe the three principal maxims taught us by our Saviour as the means of arriving at the highest perfection. Wherefore, as many illustrious men have said, the sons of St Philip who observe their rule may become great saints, and have no reason to envy religious Orders, even the most austere, their better means of acquiring holiness, since, by persevering in their own Institute, they may attain to greater sanctity, inasmuch as it is more hidden. And this was precisely the principal aim of St Philip, to sanctify
49 through the above-named exercises, not only Christians living in the world, but also, and above all, his own sons. And why should they not easily become saints if they attend with all diligence to prayer, since it is well-nigh impossible for a man truly devoted to this holy exercise to remain imperfect?

The second exercise, that is, the frequent administration as well as reception of the sacraments, was also introduced by St Philip principally for the benefit of his sons; he obliged them to purify their consciences three times a week in the sacrament of confession, and to celebrate Mass every day, when not legitimately prevented, that, with this heavenly food, they might maintain the life of the spirit, and receive continual light, so as not to mistake their road. He wished them to administer the sacrament of confession, not only to absolve penitents from their sins, but also to practise the patience that it requires; and to administer the Holy Eucharist in order to acquire ever greater faith and devotion, and thus become rich in merits.

With regard to the Word of God, Father Agostino Manni, of the Congregation of Rome, wrote that the holy Father determined that it should be delivered daily in the Congregation, in the place of the prolonged fasts, watchings, rigorous silence, and long office chanted in choir, which are practised in religious communities; as it is most true that, if attentively heard, it is so fruitful as not to be inferior to any of these exercises: indeed it appears in a certain manner to embrace
50 them all, and, through Divine grace, to have more effect than all of them put together. And besides hearing the Word of God so often, the continual study which we make of the Holy Scriptures, of the eternal truths, of the Lives of the Saints, their sayings and virtuous examples,

opens a perpetual and abundant source of devotion for the profit of our own souls. He who treats so often of spiritual matters, speaking of God in familiar and devout style in the pulpit, in the confessional, and on many other occasions, cannot fail to drive profit from it. And as Father Marciano, of the Oratory of Naples, used to say, he who touches perfumes retains the sweet smell for a long time on his hands; so the Word of God, studied in books, meditated in prayer, and afterwards expressed by words for the benefit of others, will leave in the soul a sweet fragrance and odour of virtue. If this were not so, we should deserve the just reproach of the prophet: "Why dost thou declare my justices and take my covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hast hated discipline?"²¹ Our holy Founder, therefore, could not leave his sons a richer inheritance, or one more fruitful in spiritual treasures. Thanks be then to our Saint for so many beautiful inventions arranged for our spiritual advantage; and thanks be principally to God, who has honoured us with so high a vocation, which, provided we correspond to it, leads us to nothing short of sanctity!

IX.

Our brothers may perhaps grieve that, not being priests, they are not 51 called to these sublime things, and cannot sanctify themselves by such exalted means as the administration of the sacraments and the Word of God. But they may console themselves with the thought that, as they are members of the same body, by serving the priests, they co-operate in the same great and noble end, they participate in their merits, and in all their privileges and indulgences, and consequently enjoy the same lofty prerogative. Like the priests, they both can and ought to pray; and if it does not fall to their lot to administer the sacraments, they can receive them; if they are not permitted to preach the Word of God to the faithful, they can listen to it continually, and derive the same fruit from it as do the priests, and still greater if they will. And what is more, if they have not the honour of the priesthood, they have not so formidable a burden: not being called to guide souls, they are exempt from the strict account which priests have to render to God.

²¹ Ps. xlix. 16.

CHAPTER 2

THE SECOND EXCELLENCE

AVOIDANCE OF ECCLESIASTICAL DIGNITIES AND HIGH POSITIONS

In the Church of God there are various dignities, archpriests, archdeacons, 52
abbots prelates, bishops, archbishops, primates, patriarchs, cardinals, and, lastly, the sovereign Pontiff; and all these dignities are necessary for the government of the Church. In religious Orders there are many honourable offices, such as those of general, provincial, visitor, master, defnitor, and others, and all these are necessary for their good government. Granted this necessity, how can an ecclesiastic or a religious refuse the dignities or offices offered to him without committing a fault, since those who hold them render such great service to the Church and to the religious Orders, supporting them by their authority and their laws, by holding ordinations, and by the administration of justice.

St Gregory in his Pastoral says that those who are worthy of these dignities must neither seek them nor reject them when it is manifestly the Divine will that they should assist the faithful with the talents 53
they have received from God. How, then, comes it that St Philip has forbidden his sons to aspire to, seek after, or even accept, any kind of ecclesiastical dignity, unless the sovereign Pontiff expressly command it? *Dignitates ullas nemo possit accipere, nisi Pontifex jubeat* ('No one may accept any position of dignity, unless the Pope commands it'; Inst., cap. 8).

I think I can answer that the Holy Father, like so many other Saints, perceived that to desire dignities or to procure them was full of danger to those who are not well grounded in virtue, and particularly in humility, and that it is often the cause of great evils; for a man should never himself seek for exalted posts, but humbly wait for that which God may design for him. Nor should he mount up to them

54 unless called by God; and even when he thinks he is called, the dignity having been offered to him without his having sought it, there is still a certain danger in it, as we see in the case of Saul, who was called by God Himself to be king, or in that of Judas, called to the exalted rank of Apostle by Jesus Christ. It is true that many men of great virtue have done honour to the lofty station in which they have been placed by raising themselves to higher perfection, using their dignities as stepping-stones whereby to mount to greater holiness, preserving themselves humble in their exalted positions, using their authority with discreet and prudent zeal to prevent offences against God, and their revenues and benefices with great charity for the adornment of churches and the relief of the poor, administering to all impartial justice, sanctifying their subjects with efficacious exhortations and holy example; fulfilling, in short, every duty imposed upon them by their offices and dignities, and thus doing great works for the glory of God and the advantage of Holy Church and the religious Orders to which they belonged. But it is also true that there are many, (and God grant that they be not in greater number,) who, while they lived in a lowly condition and under obedience, were men of great virtue and perfection, but who, on reaching some high degree in their religious Order, or some other dignity of the Church, have, like Lucifer, fallen through pride; and, neglectful of advancing in virtue and of the care of the souls entrusted to them, have led an idle, tepid, and relaxed life, without other study than that of their own comfort and advantage, ever endeavouring to raise themselves to still higher rank.

And therefore I consider it a great happiness and a signal prerogative of the priests of the Oratory that they are far removed from this great danger which ecclesiastical dignities bring with them, being unable to aspire to them, or to receive them, except in obedience to the sovereign Pontiff, both in order to remain deeply rooted in humility, and to imitate our holy Father St Philip, who with such constancy always refused the dignities, canonries, mitres, and even the Roman Purple, so often offered to him.

I.

55 It cannot certainly be denied that it is a mark of great humility to withdraw as far as possible from high and sublime positions, and to content ourselves with living more hidden, in a humble and lowly state. The

proof of this is that the generous refusal by so many Saints of dignities and conspicuous positions, has been canonized by the Church as an heroic action and a deed of extraordinary humility. And although St Gregory says that those who are worthy and have ability and talent for such dignities should not refuse them, nevertheless we know what he himself did to avoid them. He wrote to emperors and princes of the world, not that they might favour his election to the Pontificate, but to induce them to interpose their authority to exclude him from it. He strenuously refused to yield to the fervent prayers of the people and the universal desires of the clergy which all centred in him. He lamented, sighed, and wept; he disguised himself, fled from the city, wandered in the woods, and hid himself in caves, where, to manifest the innocent fugitive, there appeared no less a prodigy than a resplendent pillar of fire, which said to those who sought him: "Gregory is hidden here." Why, then, did the Holy Pontiff so strive to fly from dignities himself? Because, as he truly says, no one ought to esteem himself worthy, or think that he has the necessary ability, although he must not refuse them when it is evidently the will of God that he accept them,—just as he accepted the Pontificate when the will of God was so clearly manifested by the appearance of the miraculous pillar of fire.

But if this is so, how could St Paul, in his Epistle to St Timothy, say: "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work"?¹ Here by bishopric he means every government of souls, and not only does not reprove the desire of such an office, but commends it as a laudable thing. I answer that the Apostle spoke of that which ought always to be, not that which is at present; because in his time he who desired the priesthood or episcopate desired martyrdom for Jesus Christ, to shed his blood for the honour of the Church, to sacrifice himself for the souls of others, to pass his life in the Catacombs, to end it by the sword, upon the cross, or in the midst of the flames. And this is the explanation given by St Jerome: "He desires a good work; that is, not riches nor dignities, but work and labour." The Apostle saw in the episcopate only labour and martyrdom, not the splendour of the dignity, not ease nor riches, such as men in the present day look for in this office; and for such reasons he called it "a good work." But if we look, not to pure labour for the love of God and for the salvation

¹ I Tim. iii. 1.

of souls, but to honours and advantages, this desire then becomes no longer laudable; and he alone is worthy of praise who, being called by God, is ready to labour, and even, if necessary, to lay down his life, for the souls committed to his charge.

57 But with regard to ourselves, I say that the sons of St Philip may always safely refuse the dignities offered to them, because such is the will of God signified by means of our holy Father who gave us this rule, which has been approved with the rest by the sovereign Pontiffs. And indeed there is no cause in which it is lawful for us to accept them, unless when we are expressly ordered to do so by the Pope, because then the will of God is manifested in another way.

If some object to this rule, saying that if all were of this opinion the Church would suffer, I reply as did Father Olave, of the Society of Jesus, to Cardinal Marcello Cervino of Santa Croce, afterwards raised to the Pontificate under the name of Marcellus II. The Cardinal could not approve of the vow which the religious of the Society make not to accept any dignity outside the Society. He adduced, among other reasons, that the Society would have done better service to the Church of God in providing good bishops than in giving it good preachers and confessors, inasmuch as a good bishop is worth more than a good priest. The father answered him with various arguments, but seeing him still unshaken in his opinion, finally said: "If these reasons are not sufficient to convince your Eminence, we are satisfied with the authority of St Ignatius, who considered it best not to accept dignities, except in cases where the sovereign Pontiff commands it." On hearing this the Cardinal yielded, and confessed that the authority of St Ignatius was of more weight than all the reasons in the world. I say the same thing to any one who opposes this rule of St Philip. The Saint was singularly favoured by the Holy Ghost, who entered into his breast 58 in the form of a globe of fire, thus marking him out as His beloved abode, and was enriched with such light that he penetrated the hearts of men, and saw distant and future things as clearly as though they were present or past. How then can we imagine that he was mistaken in thinking that this rule would not be prejudicial to the Church, while it would be very useful to his Congregation, which he desired should ever persevere in its original purity and lowliness? The authority of St Philip is worth more than all the reasons which can be adduced to the contrary, because this, as regards ourselves, is the clearly manifested

will of God.

II.

And if there are disorders in the Church of God, or relaxations in some religious Order or Congregation, they generally arise through the ambition of those who usurp the higher places by unlawful means; for instance, by making use of the protection or friendship of the great, by gifts or promises, or still worse by feigning zeal or charity, or other virtues. I would fain hope that this never or rarely occurs. If it should happen, I would say that such persons know not what they seek. Had the sons of Zebedee known that the two seats in Christ's kingdom were the crosses of the two thieves (*crucifixi sunt cum eo duo latrones, unus a dextris et unus a sinistris*), they would not have asked for them. [There were two thieves crucified with Him, one on His right and the other on His left.] As St John Chrysostom said: *Si novissent quæ petebant, non ausi fuissent petere* [had they known what they were asking, they would not have dared to ask it]; in like manner the ambitious see not the crosses hidden under apparently brilliant honours. They will find 59 out afterwards how heavy they really are; and they will be tormented at the hour of death by the account they will have to render to the Divine Judge of their intolerable pride and of their bad government of their subjects. For it is morally impossible for any one to govern well who has intruded himself into the government without waiting to be called by God. God will give His grace and necessary assistance to him alone whom He Himself chooses for Superior.

And, in fact, experience teaches us that a religious, a nun, or a priest of the Oratory, of little talent or knowledge, without experience in governing, if elected by God—that is to say, if nominated by the electors in lawful ways, according to the prescribed rules—performs wonders, and their subjects are constrained to say, “This is more than we hoped for.” But, on the other hand, God will deny His grace and assistance to those who intrude themselves by artifice into the office of Superior or any other honourable position. In general, any one who endeavours to rise to a high rank in order to satisfy his own love for dominion and command, or to shake off the yoke of obedience, leads a bad life without any other rule than that of his own passions; and, consequently, instead of gaining the necessary grace and light from God, he deserves ever more and more to be abandoned by Him. It

would, indeed, be a minor evil if it resulted only in his own perdition.
60 Let such be his fate since he has chosen it for himself; but the worst evil is the serious injury it causes to the whole Order or Congregation.

It was to avoid these great dangers that the holy Father, seeing that no house which embraced his Institute could do without a Superior to govern it, laid such burdens upon this position, and so deprived it is every alleviation, that it appears almost impossible for any subject, without great pride and perfect blindness, to conceive the slightest desire of it, much less to use the smallest endeavour to obtain it,—because, in truth, the office of the Provost is nothing more than a cross in all its nakedness.

III.

Our holy Founder adopted this plan of having neither dignities nor honourable offices in his houses in order to keep us always humble, but he taught us by his example a still greater depth of humility, which is not only to practise it, as he did in so often refusing the Cardinal's hat offered to him by the sovereign Pontiffs, but also to renounce the honour which humility brings with it. That he might not appear humble he made no show of flying from the dignity offered to him, but he begged of the sovereign Pontiff to defer this honour for the present, saying that when the proper time for accepting it should have arrived he would let him know. And by this holy device he escaped the dignities which were so abhorrent to him, and keeping to his humble and lowly state, he became a great Saint. He afterwards confided to his
61 own fathers these innocent artifices, and with the word "PARADISE! PARADISE!" he threw into the air the Cardinal's beretta, which had already been brought to his room, and declared that there was no dignity to be desired for priests of the Oratory except Paradise.

In imitation of this example of our holy Father, Father Francesco Maria Tarugi used every means to escape from high and conspicuous dignities. When Pope Clement VIII. wished to make him Archbishop of Avignon, he laid before him with all possible urgency his own inability and infirmities; he implored him to leave him in peace, and told him that this appointment would be a subject of scandal to the world, and that people would no longer believe any one, because he was so well known and had so often spoken against accepting dignities, and that he was resolved to die sooner than give such scandal. When he

saw that none of his words made the least impression, but that the Pope repeated his commands and used all his authority to make him accept this dignity, he at last took him a letter from his doctor who declared that the state of his health would not permit him to bear the journey to Avignon, or even if he should go through it, it would disable him and bring about his death. But all was in vain, the Pope was quire resolved that he should be Archbishop of that diocese, and some time afterwards he moreover willed to create him Cardinal.

Father Cesare Baronio likewise used the same endeavours to avoid dignities. One can hardly read without tears of the deep distress he felt when made by the same Pope Proto-notary Apostolic, and afterwards Cardinal. He wished to fly from Rome, but was dissuaded by the other fathers, who considered it useless, and difficult of execution for a person of his age. He had recourse to God in prayer, he made a vow to visit the Seven Churches barefooted if God would save him from so great a danger; and then, prostrate at the feet of the Pope, with prayers and tears he declared before God how much harm the Church would suffer by his promotion, since heretics, as he said, would seize the opportunity to discredit the Ecclesiastical Annals composed by him, and to calumniate them by saying that the author had written in favour of the Roman Church not through zeal for the truth, but in order to obtain the Sacred Purple. He also reminded his Holiness that if he were made Cardinal, the occupations necessarily connected with such a dignity would prevent him from prosecuting the ecclesiastical history so much desired by the sovereign Pontiff. But the Pope with a severe countenance briefly answered that he had maturely considered everything, and then added: "We command you by our Apostolic authority to obey and be silent, under pain of excommunication if you do not obey." And he was thus forced to obey. Both Baronio and Tarugi lamented bitterly for the rest of their lives their having been torn from the nest of their well-beloved Congregation and raised to so high a dignity, as if it had been the greatest misfortune, and, as they used to say, a punishment for their sins; being quite confused at not having so great merit as their Father Philip, who had succeeded in escaping the honours offered to him.

Hence we learn what beautiful fruits of sanctity we may gather in the simplicity of our state and in a private and hidden life, which has always been the surest of the roads to heaven. It was taught us

to be so by Jesus Christ Himself, who after having led a hidden life during thirty consecutive years, when He was manifested to all in the last three years of His life, in His missions and preachings to the world, far from desiring dignities, on the contrary, fled when they wished to make Him king, and protested that He was not come to command but to obey, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister."²

64 Let us therefore remain humble and unknown, as was so much inculcated by our holy Founder, in the lowly and obscure houses of the Oratory, and thus avoiding the dangers which await those who ascend to lofty station, let us render God thanks for having granted us so beautiful a prerogative, which makes paradise easier and more certain for us. Although we refuse ecclesiastical dignities, there will never be wanting in the Church men of distinguished learning and singular goodness on whom they can be conferred, while, on the other hand, if we were to accept them, our Congregations would be deprived of their best subjects, whose place cannot be so easily supplied with us as in the religious Orders which have numbers of monasteries or convents. And what is more, it would destroy the end of our Institute, which is to have the same men preaching the Word of God familiarly, and assisting in the tribunal of penance thirty, forty, nay fifty continuous years in the same place, who, by long experience of the souls which they direct, become good spiritual physicians to them, better able to treat them and confirm them in piety, never forsaking them until death.

IV.

And as it is the will of God that the sons of St Philip should not accept dignities of any sort, and thus abandon their vocation, it is also the will of God that they accept the offices assigned to them by the Congregation. It is true that these offices are, as we have said, so burdensome and of so little lustre, that it seems impossible for a man of moderate understanding to seek after or desire them. The office of Provost is usually accepted with many tears, and I was myself witness of the deep sighs and sorrowful words of the Venerable Father Valfrè, of the Congregation of Turin, the last time that he was elected Provost; and of the tears of some among us when they have been called to the post of Superior.

²Matt. xx. 28.

I might bring forward many examples of this among the fathers of several Congregations, but, to be brief, I will merely cite that of Father Licinio Pio, founder of the Congregation of Bologna. He so hated the name of Superior of the Congregation that for this reason he could hardly bring himself to found it. He consented, however, to put himself under the yoke, in obedience to the commands of Father Santolini, of the Oratory of Rome, who was his director, though living at a distance. Shortly after, he endeavoured several times to get rid of the burden, and was sorely tempted to give up the office to Father Alamandini and retire into some religious Order to live unknown and despised. But as he was unaccustomed to decide anything without the approval of Father Santolini, he communicated his intention to him and received this answer:—"Let your Reverence be tranquil, and bear patiently the load which God has placed on your shoulders, and that is sufficient." This satisfied him for some time, but afterwards, feeling his heart disturbed every time he heard himself called Superior, either in the house or out of it, he was again troubled by his former temptation; and in the first year of his government he wrote three times to Father Santolini to obtain his permission to lay down the burden he so detested, hoping through his persistence to gain his desire. But Father Santolini continued to deny him this much-coveted permission, reproving him for his cowardice and timidity, and he finally convinced him by a letter, in which he shows him what it is to be Superior of the Congregation of the Oratory, or to hold any office in it. I willingly transcribe this letter here, because it may bring consolation to those who are forced to accept this post of Superior, or any other inferior office.

He writes as follows:—"Respecting the Superiority which you hold in the Congregation, which has been given you by God, apply yourself to exercising it quietly, and do not desire to do that which many Saints have done in renouncing dignities, charges, and offices of distinction, through pure motives of humility and because God showed them that He so willed it. All the offices in our Congregation, and particularly that of Superior, are mere exercises of mortification, which we should bear cheerfully to encourage others to support the greatest fatigues. I willingly admit that your Reverence may be the vilest person in the Congregation, but precisely for this reason God wills to make use of you in such a position, in order that we may

learn that He is everything and our prudence nothing. But let us lay aside these considerations, and let us, dear Father Licinio, take care to labour where God has called us, and never to think of ourselves or of following our own inclinations, but of the will of God alone. Be patient, and let yourself be guided by that Divine Providence who has placed you in that position. Bear that charge willingly, because it will profit you more than if you were to put on haircloth and ashes and discipline yourself to blood.”

67 After receiving this letter Father Licinio gave way, and as through humility he did not wish for the post of Superior, so through humility he submitted to the opinion of his director, and spoke no more of giving it up; for it shows equal humility to accept dignities in submission to God, when He makes known in some way that such is His will, or to refuse them, believing yourself unworthy of them.

In proof of this, observe the resistance offered to God by the Prophet Jeremias, who, in order to escape the splendid dignity which constituted him superior over the princes of Juda, the primates of the Hebraic law, and the priests of the sanctuary, pleaded with God his youth, his defect of speech, his inexperience and inaptitude for command, excusing himself with sighs and tears: “And I said, Ah, ah, ah, Lord God; behold I cannot speak, for I am a child!”³ But God did not accept his excuses, and declared openly that He wished him to be His lieutenant in the government of so great a people and in the management of such important affairs; and then the chosen one bowed his head and obeyed. He did not renew his opposition; he did not persist in his determination, but surrendered and accepted it. This led St Gregory to exclaim: “Jeremias is truly humble, because he both retired with modesty and accepted without obstinacy.”

We should learn by this behaviour of the holy Prophet and by the teaching of the Holy Pontiff to be humble in considering ourselves unworthy of every office in the Congregation, and humble in accepting them when the Congregation is resolved to give them to us; and not only the lowest offices and the easiest to perform, but also the highest and most difficult, which is that of Superior.

³Jer. i. 6.

CHAPTER 3

THE THIRD EXCELLENCE

CHARITY

God has given to the Congregation of St Philip as its most specific Excellence, the queen of all virtues—the one which the Divine Word made man came to practise on earth—namely Charity. It consists in an intimate union of the fathers one with another in great love and brotherly feeling, although they may be numerous, and often differing much in nation, in disposition, rank, learning, and other talents and gifts; observing equality in all things, without admitting privileges or exemptions, except in case of illness or other necessity, and without even allowing particular friendships, which might disturb the peace of the community. And this union of charity is all the more admirable because our subjects are not permitted to change their residence, as religious may do, in order to avoid the annoyances which result from differences of character, but are obliged to endure them even till death, and digest them with the heat of this same charity, in imitation of Christ our Lord, who, having once chosen the company 68 of His Apostles, never more abandoned them until death, although He had to bear with their rudeness of manners, their simplicity, ignorance, and defects.

And in fact experience proves that he alone who has true charity can hope to persevere in the Congregation, and to make progress towards perfection. When our holy Father was once asked what were the rules he had given to his sons—for they must be very numerous to produce in them such a spirit of sanctity—he answered that he had only given them one, that is to say, charity. Hence this may be said to be the chief characteristic of our Congregation, causing its subjects to live together in peace and harmony, uniting the various Congregations of the Oratory in a bond of love, however distant they may be from each other, and occupying all the fathers in continual labours for the good of their neighbour. This renders it an image of the primitive 69

Church, in which the faithful “had but one heart and one soul.”¹ For this reason St Francis of Sales, who is numbered among us, since he was the Founder and first Provost of the Congregation of Thonon, called the Congregation of the Oratory *a marvellous and excellent manner of life*, because it is bound together by the imperceptible tie of charity—a society of persons differing in disposition, but one in spirit, which makes us all “walk in the house of God with consent.”²

I.

70 This Excellence of charity, thus closely uniting so many priests and brothers in one house, unites also, as has been said, all the Congregations of St Philip in the closest bond of love; and although in external things there is no communication between them, nor any participation in temporal goods, as the holy Father rules that each house should govern itself separately: *Unaquæque domus, aut familia, nostræ formam imitata, separatim ab aliis se per se regat et moderetur. Ne quis pretextu ampliandæ Congregationis eam dissipet, atque ut confusio vitetur quam multitudo parere solet* (‘Each house or family which imitates the form of ours, should rule and govern itself on its own and separately from others. This is because no one should diminish the Congregation on the pretext of enlarging it, and to avoid the confusion which large numbers are apt to cause.’ Inst., cap. 4); nevertheless there is such an interchange of affection between all priests of the Oratory, that, although they may never have met, they still love one another with mutual love and unfeigned charity.

This most close union of charity, wrote Father Consolini to a father of another Congregation, unites all our hearts and souls to God in such a bond that it makes both one;³ and the difference of dispositions, the remoteness of countries, the diversity arising from nationalities unknown to us, or houses greater than our own, or subjects of greater ability,—none of these things chill our mutual love; and this same union of charity and benevolence is not only common to our fathers and lay-brothers, but also to the brothers of the Little Oratory living in the world, as has been often remarked on occasion of their journeys.

71 From this charity it results that when our Lord favours a Congregation

¹ Acts iv. 32.

² Ps. liv. 15.

³ Eph. ii. 14.

with some great gift of holiness or renown, every other one rejoices in it as if it were its own, imitating the blessed in heaven, among whom those who have less merit or glory enjoy the greater merit and glory of the others. We recognise all as brothers because we are all sons of the same Father, practising the same rules and customs; and when one Congregation can serve another in any way, it does so with the utmost willingness; nor are they ever at variance, but always united in emulating each others' virtues.

This loving correspondence between the Congregations of St Philip is all the more remarkable because they are not under any obligation to lodge the subjects of other Congregations, as is the case with religious Orders. People are astonished, and apparently not much edified, when they see a priest of the Oratory, on arriving in some town, go to an inn or the house of a friend, rather than to the house of St Philip. I feel bound to explain to them that all the Congregations glory in exercising hospitality, receiving willingly into their houses the religious who are passing through their town who have no house of their own there, especially those of the mendicant Orders, and still more willingly the fathers and brothers of St Philip, of whatever place or nation, offering them gentle violence to induce them to accept their hospitality. And in proof thereof, we find among the various offices which the Congregation assigns to its members that of Guest-master given to two fathers, in order that if one be absent there may be another to supply his place. It is only in large and frequented capitals that our Congregations are not wont to lodge the subjects of other Congregations; for besides the difficulty of providing accommodation for as many visitors as might come at once, our rule forbids us to receive strangers on a long visit, even though they should be bishops or great personages; and fathers of other houses generally go to large cities, not for a few days for change of air or amusement, but for many days, and even months, on business either of their own or their Congregation. It would also cause serious inconvenience to the community, because they might not be able to be present at the regular hours of dinner and supper and retiring to rest, except at great inconvenience to themselves.

The Congregations of great cities being unable therefore to lodge other fathers, are accustomed to invite them to dinner from time to time, to render them all possible services, and to show them every

sort of kindness, as I have myself experienced from the Congregation of Turin and from that of Genoa. In other cities, however, through which they may pass, they are most willingly received into the house; nay, the fathers are much disappointed if they do not accept their offer, either because of not having time to stop, or of being in the company of others whom they cannot leave.

73 This correspondence of charity between our Congregations seems to me an imitation of the mutual charity of the Church triumphant in heaven, militant on earth, and suffering in Purgatory: the Church triumphant in heaven, with its intercession before the throne of God, assists the combats of the Church militant on earth; the latter with her prayers, sacrifices, alms, and tears, alleviates the pains of the Church suffering in Purgatory; while the Church suffering prays amid the flames, and when she escapes from that prison and ascends to heaven, impetrates new succour for the Church militant on earth. Here is the prototype of all true charity. In like manner each of our Congregations affords assistance to the others. If one is prosperous, the other rejoices as a sister in its advantages; if one experiences annoyances and contradictions, the other feels pain and compassion, as if these things were done to itself. If some grave illness attacks one, the subjects of another come to its assistance to supply the place of those who are disabled, besides rendering them any other service in their power, as we have often seen, and also in time of war. For instance, when the city of Genoa was bombarded by the French, the Congregation of Brescia offered to the Congregation of that city, with the utmost courtesy, accommodation in their own house; and there are not a few of these most edifying examples.

II.

73 Now to return to the charity which should be practised within all the houses of St Philip, and which is one of their most remarkable Excellences; I propose, in order that it may be perpetually maintained, without ever growing cold, to suggest here the following maxims, which the Venerable Father Mariano Sozzini, of the Congregation of Rome, gave to this effect:—

1. To love all with a cordial love. 2. To excuse all. 3. To speak well of all. 4. To judge kindly of all. 5. To do good to all. 6. To compassionate all from the heart, and to pray to God every day for all.

7. Not to say sharp things, even if it were only to show your quickness. 8. To guard against antipathies, and to control them by virtue. 9. To keep yourself with equal diligence from sympathies and particular friendships, which are prejudicial to common and holy charity; although it is not contrary to it to frequent the most virtuous, whose society is the most useful. 10. To beware lest diversity of opinions should degenerate into factions; always perseveringly and charitably attending to your own duty and the good of the Congregation, without eagerly espousing any of the parties. 11. In the recreations which take place twice a day, after dinner and supper, in order to refresh our spirits and to foster charity, to ask of God the four first fruits of the Holy Ghost: *charity, joy, peace, and patience*. 12. Not to engage in works of external charity without having first fulfilled all that interior and domestic charity requires. These maxims are most excellent and necessary if we would preserve charity ever alive and burning in our Congregations; and in order that they may remain strongly impressed in our hearts, and that we may see more clearly what that charity is which is practised, and must absolutely be practised by all the sons of St Philip, I will explain them at greater length. 75

1. *To love all with a cordial love*. This has no need of explanation, since it is a natural and divine precept, and a special command of Christ: *Diligite alterutrum* [love one another]. 2. *To excuse all as far as possible*. This follows from the natural law: *Quod tibi vis fieri, alteri feceris* [do to others what you would have them do to you]. We wish to be excused by others when we need it; let us do the same by our brothers. 3. *To speak well of all*. I need not say much on this point, since the natural law itself gives us this rule; and the Apostle James tells that he only is a perfect man who does not offend his neighbour by his words. 4. *To judge well of all*. Because to judge ill of our brothers, however slightly, is directly contrary to charity; since by the evil judgment we make, our esteem for them is lost, or at best diminished; and with the loss or diminution of esteem that love is lost or diminished which we owe them by every title. It is not allowable to suspect evil of our neighbour without sufficient grounds. Consider, then, if it can be allowable to judge him. The Superior alone may lawfully suspect when there are only slight grounds for it. For if this were not permitted to him he could not investigate the doings of his subjects, and consequently could not remedy them if they were wrong or defective.

76

This is the rock on which so many strike, and this readiness to judge our brothers is of great prejudice to religious communities. One remains in his room, and does not go out unless from sheer necessity, and even then unwillingly; and because he sees another father often leaving the house, he lightly judges him to be dissipated, little given to prayer and study, fond of seeing the world and amusing himself, even if he does not judge him to be something worse. And this one who often goes out, and even leaves the city on important business, or, impelled by his great zeal, employs himself in many works of charity, visiting the sick and prisoners, arranging domestic feuds, preventing sin, and the like;—this one, I say, who sees the other always at home and silent, sets him down for a melancholy man, a hypochondriac of the first water, full of scruples, or idle and averse to all exertion. Here is a hotbed of erroneous judgments.

77

Why do they not rather reflect that God does not guide all men in the same manner? From some He exacts one thing, and from others another; from some more contemplation, from others more action; from these a love of retirement, from those works of external charity. Why not reflect that it may be the design of Providence that the one should seek retirement and the other not? If all were to go out, there would be none remaining at home for the functions and urgent needs of the house which might arise unexpectedly. If all were to remain at home, the sick of the city would not be visited, many sins and disorders would remain unchecked, and our neighbour would not be succoured in his spiritual necessities. One confessor will grant the frequent reception of Holy Communion to his penitents, considering it necessary and seeing the good effects of it. Another who is stricter about allowing so many Communions, from greater respect to the most Holy Sacrament, or for other good reasons, judges him to be imprudent, and as such condemns him; while the confessor who is more liberal will judge the stricter one to be ignorant or little versed in the direction of souls, or possessed of little zeal for their spiritual advancement. These are erroneous and ill-founded judgments. Both these confessors intend to do right, and do right, because each one is differently inspired by God, and acts according to the inspirations which are given him. That great master of spirituality, our Father Consolini, said that it is a great error for a confessor to seek to guide his penitents according to his own spirit. He should rather guide them by that way which he observes to

be conformable to the Divine will, weighing well their inclinations, measuring their strength and their health, reflecting on their state and on all the circumstances of time and place; not obliging all to do what he does himself, nor even what he judges to be in itself the best and most perfect, but rather what is best, or most perfect, or most useful for the souls he guides.

This same rule should be observed by Masters with their novices and Superiors with their subjects. Now if it is a great error for a confessor to seek to guide souls according to his own spirit, and not according to their own state and circumstances, it is no less an error for a father or brother of the Congregation to want all to do that which he does, and as he does it, and, if they should not, to judge them to be less good than himself. Oh! what injury ensues to a whole community from judgments such as these! If any one considers his brother wanting in this or that respect, he will begin to lose his esteem for him, and with his esteem his love will go; and so charity is lost. Each one is guided by his own peculiar spirit. Let us leave him alone; if he does ill, his Superior will admonish and correct him; it is no affair of ours. 78

If any one through zeal thinks himself bound to inform the Superior of the fault he sees in his brother let him take good care that his judgment is well founded, otherwise let him refrain. Because, if the Superior, relying on this account, corrects the supposed faulty father, and he clearly proves his innocence, he would have a good right to be displeased with his false accuser. Hence arise unpleasantnesses, and charity is easily wounded. Let us be slow in judging, and prompt in banishing this most dangerous temptation to judge others because they do not walk like ourselves. One says Mass quickly, another slowly; the one, in preaching, discourses with sweetness, the other with warmth and severity; one is inclined to exterior penances, another to interior mortifications; one eats but sparingly, another in sufficient quantity. How can you judge in these matters? Dispositions and temperaments are so different. One sometimes misses the community exercises—for instance, the first table, or the evening Oratory—and you immediately judge him to be inobservant, without reflecting that he may have legitimate reasons for it,—either illness or some great work of charity, or the requirements of his office, or some other business of the house which does not admit of delay. He is not obliged to tell these reasons to you, but only to the Superior. It is for him, 79

and not for you, to judge. One is generally very cheerful at the common recreation, another quiet and serious. What interpretation will you put upon their conduct? That the one is dissipated and the other churlish? That the one is better than the other? For shame! That would indeed be a judgment made without judgment. Our holy Father St Philip was always joyful; St Charles Borromeo appeared a little severe. The Venerable Father Giovenale Ancina was very genial and pleasant; Father Giovanni Matteo, his brother, also a son of St Philip, was quite serious and melancholy,—and they were all Saints. What do you say to this? Judgment is reserved to God alone, and to Superiors when they have good grounds for it, and must judge in virtue of their office. To others it is never allowable. *Nolite judicare* [do not judge],⁴ unless it be well of all. Otherwise you will violate charity and do great injury to your own soul and to the whole community. On the contrary, if you always judge well of all, and never ill, charity will be firmly maintained, because esteem and love for all will always be preserved.

80 5. *To do good as far as possible*, and I add, *principally to those of our own house*. It is a virtue much commended by St Francis of Sales, and an admirable secret for fostering mutual charity, to render service cordially one to another, as occasion offers; to oblige our brethren, whether they be priests or lay-brothers, novices or decennials, old or young, in indifferent things which are not sinful or against our rule. To do the contrary, to excuse ourselves, now on one pretext, now on another; to defer some service asked of us because it would be more convenient to wait till another time; or again, to refuse it absolutely, and perhaps in words not very gentle, or but little respectful, if not absolutely contemptuous,—all these things are but too well calculated to extinguish charity. When our brother is not assisted by us as he had hoped, and perhaps in matters very easy and of slight inconvenience to us, and knows we are not prevented from helping him by any necessary occupation or other just cause, he fancies we do not love him, and his own love towards us grows cold, and behold, charity is already extinguished. Our most loving Jesus, who came on earth to minister, and not to be ministered unto, was ever ready to do good to all, and to condescend to all in lawful things. “He went about doing good.”⁵

⁴Matt. vii. 1.

⁵Acts x. 38.

He not only did not refuse the favours asked of Him, but offered to do them of His own accord; as to the man born blind: "What wilt thou that I should do to thee?"⁶ and to the centurion: "I will come and heal him."⁷ St Philip was singularly distinguished for this practice, as were also his first sons and all those who came after them, whose virtuous lives have been recorded for our edification and instruction. St Teresa was ever prompt and attentive in assisting the nuns her sisters, and when she could do nothing else, she folded their cloaks secretly in choir, and in the evening she would place herself, lamp in hand on the staircase, to light all those who were coming up. These Saints had hearts full of charity and desirous of imitating Christ, and such must we have. 81

6. *To compassionate all from the heart.* First of all in their bodily infirmities: and the office of infirmarian is one of great merit if it is performed with charity, patience, and faith, recognizing in the person of the sick Jesus Christ Himself. The infirmarians, says St Francis of Sales, stand at the foot of the cross with our Blessed Lady and St John, imitating their compassion; and the sick are on the cross imitating the Passion of Christ. Our Institute desires that not only the infirmarians, but also the others, should often visit the sick of the house. *Omnes frequenter adsunt, subveniunt, consolantur, inserviunt, confirmant quam diligentissime* ('All should frequently visit them, assist them, console them, serve them and strengthen them with the greatest diligence'; Inst., cap. 9). And it is this which gives our subjects courage to labour, because they are sure of being assisted with all charity in their illnesses; for if they had not this assurance, they might perhaps spare themselves from fear of falling ill.

Secondly, we ought to compassionate all for their natural and moral defects. This seems easy with regard to natural defects, but with moral defects I confess it is more difficult. This, however, would not be the case if we were humble, and careful to look only at ourselves and not at others. Father Giovanni Andrea Lenzi, of the Congregation of the Oratory of Faenza, in his MS. entitled "The Difficulties of Community Life," which I shall have occasion sometimes to quote, speaking on this point, says "that a certain subject may appear to us faulty, not because he is really so, but perhaps because he does not 82

⁶Mark x. 51.

⁷Matt. viii. 7.

adapt himself to our disposition; and this makes us find difficulty in bearing with him. Herein lies the real defect, that we look outside ourselves at our neighbour, and consider him full of faults, instead of reflecting on the faults that are within ourselves, neither thinking nor knowing that our brothers have to tolerate in us very much more than we have to tolerate in them. This is self-love, which is a great evil, since it hides our own defects, and causes us to be more vexed with those of others than with our own, which are perhaps much greater, and of which alone we shall have to give an account. 'For what have I to do to judge them that are without?'⁸ This is one of the great advantages of community life, that we both learn and profit even by the defects of our brothers, having to renounce our own judgment. Hence I know not what worse Lucifer can be found in the heaven of a religious community than the person who esteems himself better than others, or at any rate foolishly imagines himself to be without defects: for the Holy Spirit says that he cannot make a greater mistake than this, and that he surpasses all others in one thing only, that is, in diabolical pride.

83 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.'⁹ And if he has any good in him, he has it through the pure grace of God: 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'¹⁰

"It is necessary to understand this. We are all members of one body, that is, of our community, and Christ is our Head; and we all have a most strict obligation to bear with one another, "in charity unfeigned."¹¹ This certainly cannot apply to virtues, but to natural weaknesses—to the inequality of talents and gifts, which do not proceed from our own virtue, but from God, who gives to one more, to another less. It applies also to the imperfections which we see our brothers commit, and to their omissions, which perhaps may not be voluntary on their part. And even if they were, are we not capable of committing greater ones? Have we not actually committed some? May we not commit some in future?" So far Father Lenzi; and I say further, that if we compassionate him who is wounded in a hand, who loses an eye or breaks an arm, shall we not still more compassionate one who injures, however slightly, his soul, which is so much more

⁸ 1 Cor. v. 12.

⁹ 1 John i. 8.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

¹¹ 2 Cor. vi. 6.

precious than the body?

It is this compassion, the true daughter of charity, which nourishes and preserves peace in religious communities. If through it we bear with the defects of the others, we shall also bear with their various humours and the contradictions we meet with. By this we recognize true charity, which is inseparable from humility, and which endures all things. "Charity beareth all things."¹² When we meet with two persons who cannot live together in peace in the same house, who readily take offence with one another, and are with difficulty reconciled, it is perfectly clear that there is pride in both of them. Therefore we cannot teach or maintain charity where there is not humility; and for this reason St Paul, after having exhorted Christians to fraternal charity, immediately recommends them to be humble: "Let each esteem others better than themselves."¹³ It was for this end, I think, that our holy Father St Philip so much recommended humility to us, and has removed from us as far as possible every pretext for pretension and punctiliousness. He used always to say, "*Be humble, be lowly.*" Let us receive this paternal admonition, and never blame the pride of others who cause us annoyance. Let us blame ourselves who are unable to tolerate and compassionate them with humility. And let us remember that we shall not be saved through the humility and patience of others, but through our own. The elements are by nature entirely contrary to each other; now that which Divine Omnipotence effects in our body, uniting things in themselves so opposite, charity ought to effect in a religious community, uniting people so contrary in disposition, without any disagreement or dissension. 84

Shall we, then, allow ourselves to be tempted to leave the Congregation, or, at any rate, to remain in it unwillingly, because there are in it persons of the most opposite characters to our own? No, no! 85 Charity would not suffer it; on the contrary, in the midst of contradictions, and in the humble and generous endurance of them, virtue becomes refined and charity perfected as gold in the fire. Remember the beautiful reply made by the holy Mother de Chantal to one of the nuns of the Visitation. The nun had asked her to transfer her to another monastery, because in the one where she was there were two nuns, who, besides having imperfections and uncongenial tempers,

¹² 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

¹³ 2 Phil. ii. 3.

86 had always thwarted her. "I wish them no evil," she added, "but I really can hardly bear the sight of them; I cannot accommodate myself to their dispositions, nor have I the courage to undergo so many and such constant contradictions." The prudent mother listened to all she said, and then answered: "My daughter, when you appear before the Divine tribunal, God will say to you: 'I have loved you from all eternity, and I love you still as My creature, but I cannot agree with you, nor can I suffer so many contradictions and affronts on your part; I cannot bear either to see you or to speak to you; your very presence causes Me annoyance; we must, therefore, separate: I will remain in my abode, which is Paradise; you in yours, distant from Me; and do you where that is? Now depart far from Me.'" This wise answer bore great fruit; the nun never again spoke of changing her monastery; and thenceforward she bore with patience the company of those persons whom formerly she abhorred. Let us beware, then, of ever separating ourselves from our brothers because we cannot bear with them, for by so doing we might easily separate ourselves also from God. Let us sympathize with all, in everything, and through everything, if we wish to merit for ourselves the sympathy of God and man.

7. *Never to say sharp things, even if it were only to show your quickness.* All have not the virtue to endure them without replying, especially on the first impulse; and one reply may provoke another, and thus enkindle a fire contrary to charity. Our holy Father knew us to be men liable to offend our brothers, either advisedly or thoughtlessly, either through vivacity of intellect, or hastiness of temper, or natural aversion, therefore he ordained that when one of us has offended his brother by some word, the same evening, towards the end of supper, when the doubts which are proposed at table are finished, the offender on his knees in the middle of the refectory shall make his culpa, and ask aloud for forgiveness from the person offended, and for a penance from the Father Provost; and the father who was offended, rising from his place, and also kneeling, shall take upon himself the fault by the occasion he may have given for it; and the Father Provost shall impose upon the offender some light penance, or none, according to the offence.

8. *To guard against antipathies and to control them by virtue.* If antipathies are natural, we should not make much account of them, according to the advice of St Francis of Sales. For example, one person

may be naturally slow, another quick; one rough, another gentle; one cheerful, another melancholy; we must not pay any attention to this, but turn our thoughts away, and thus deceive our minds. If, however, aversions arise from other causes, for instance, from some slight we have received, we must then combat them and submit them to reason, which does not allow us to be influenced in any way by our aversions, for fear of offending God. On the contrary, we must approach this person, assume a pleasant manner, and speak to him in the kindest way possible. I know that one of the fathers of the Congregation in which I live had a great antipathy for another; to master it, he resolved to go out with him whenever he went to take a walk, and by this means he overcame it. 87

9. *To keep yourself with equal diligence from sympathies and particular friendships*, which are prejudicial to common and holy charity, although there is nothing against it in frequenting those who are the most holy, whose society is the most useful, and with whom there is not so much danger of faulty and hurtful attachments. To show to one in particular more affection than is fitting and consistent with Christian prudence may in certain cases disturb common charity; and such friendships are called by St Augustine the poison of true friendship. St Teresa blamed it exceedingly in her nuns, and St Philip in his children; and those first fervent companions of our holy Father, whenever they perceived it, used to say that it was *facere congregationem in congregatione* [to create a congregation within the Congregation]. This would be the case if we were to be more intimate with one than another in the time of the recreation in common, to take one aside to speak to him in secret, and similar things. The reason adduced by Father Lenzi in his manuscript is that the greatest good enjoyed in communities is the love which is shared equally by all; and in such cases you rob the Congregation of the love which the others bear you, and you bestow your own affection solely on one person; and that if others were to do the same, common charity would be divided, and there would no longer be one family, but many families living under one roof. 88

Some dispositions are indeed so uniform that it is impossible to lay down positive rules upon this subject. Our Lord Himself loved St John the Evangelist above all; but who can affirm that He loved him through natural disposition? In so far as He was man, the dispositions of Christ and His passions were not evil, but pure and holy affections

proper only to Himself; and although He loved St John so much, He did not appoint him head of the Church, nor do we read that He showed him such confidence as to cause any loss to the other disciples, as might be the case in the intimacy between one man and another. "Experience also shows us," adds Father Lenzi, "that love founded on natural character, and not on charity and grace, is often like the grass growing on the roofs, 'which withereth before it be plucked up.'¹⁴ And when this love which is founded on similarity of disposition is destroyed, it is like a broken vessel, which can hardly ever be perfectly mended."

How many evils have not been produced by the partiality of fathers and mothers, who show greater affection to one child than to another? This partiality gives rise to dissensions among brothers and sisters which are well-nigh implacable. Examples of this are to be found in Holy Scripture, particularly that of the Patriarch Jacob, who, with all his goodness, because he did not regulate his natural affection, became the cause of envy and hatred among his children. Our own disposition will never be good for anything if it is not mortified; because virtue is not cultivated by following our natural disposition, but by the violence we do to it to direct it to a good end. "Whoever is governed by his own inclination has his spirit in his heels," said St Philip to a lay-brother.

To love thus from inclination is to love, not our neighbour, but ourselves, because we seek our own satisfaction in that neighbour, whom, as he is a creature, we ought properly to love not for his own sake, but only for love of God; to please and obey Him who has left us the precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."¹⁵ Another very bad effect of loving solely through inclination is that it completely destroys the liberty of him who loves: for if I love a person and he does not return my love, I immediately become sad and lose my peace of mind, thus proving my love to be merely jealousy, which fetters both myself and him whom I love; and if this love continues, it will place a yoke on the neck of both of us. In fact, if I have to decide anything, I feel bound to communicate it to my friend, whether in season or out of season. If I see that he is not loved as much as I wish, or that he is not spoken of to his advantage, I become angry with whoever is the

¹⁴Ps. cxxviii. 6.

¹⁵Mark xii. 31.

cause of it; and if I perceive that he is beloved or much praised, or his society sought after by others, I grow jealous, fearing lest he should abandon me. No, no, says St Paul, not so many loves, nor divisions of love. "I indeed am of Paul, and I am of Apollo; and I of Cephas, and I of Christ;"¹⁶ and another love I will not have.

Our friendship ought to be fruitful, and it never can be so if it is not founded on God, but simply on natural disposition and sympathy. Flesh and blood do not reveal, nor justify, as doth the Spirit, which vivifies even works that are almost dead. Our heart is made for God, and He cannot give us, nor can we find, an object for our love more worthy than Himself. Out of God we shall never find true or permanent satisfaction. Far be from us, therefore, those sympathies which lead to particular friendships, for they are always hurtful. Let our love be universal for all, and particularly for all those of our own house, without special attachment to any. And although it is allowable to love more one who has done us the most good, or whom we know to be the most holy and to have most love of God, it is not allowable to exclude anyone from our love. St Thomas, speaking of this universal and well-regulated love and charity, exclaims: "O love! rule of the elect and rule of all rules! Universal law and law of laws! Virtue of virtues! Sentence pronounced by the King of Kings, and which He has not only published by His own authority, but taught with His own mouth and confirmed by His own example!" This is that law which the Holy Scripture says is all of fire, and which the Sovereign Legislator holds in His right hand.¹⁷ All other laws are only laws of earth, which weigh down and do not raise up, whose burden oppresses, and which do not compensate those who observe them; but the law of universal charity is a law all of fire, which enlightens, inflames, and exults. "This law, all of fire," says Philo-Judæus, is a light which illuminates those who observe it, and a fire which destroys those who dare to violate it." Oh! how beautiful, how expressive is this simile of fire! It shows us that as a fire which was partial, and would only enlighten or warm or burn what it pleased, would be very prejudicial to many; so charity which is partial and not universal, loving some and not all, inflicts the most grievous injury on religious communities. Therefore, in order that this great injury may not befall our Congregation, let us beware

¹⁶ I Cor. i. 12.

¹⁷ Deut. xxxiii. 2.

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of sympathies which prevent our fulfilling entirely and as we ought that universal law.

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10. *To beware lest diversity of opinions should degenerate into factions*: always doing our own duty perseveringly and charitably, seeking the good of the Congregation without eagerly espousing either side. There is nothing more capable of causing divisions in the Congregation than obstinacy in our own opinion. The evil does not consist in the diversity of opinion, since even among the holy Apostles and greatest Doctors of the Church there have been such differences, without their holiness having suffered by it. It is well known that *tot homines tot sententiæ* [there are as many opinions as there are men], and that "Every man abounds in his own sense."¹⁸ Every one believes himself to have good ground for supporting his own opinion, especially when he thinks he has a good intention. But the evil lies in persisting in it, and thinking it better than that of others, because in this there is an evident want of humility. It is still worse if by our obstinacy we cause no small displeasure to our brothers, or begin to despise them in our hearts, or to call them by some injurious name, such as ignorant or blind, in order not to retract our own opinion, thinking that if we did so we should lose our reputation; trying, moreover, to put our foot on the neck of this or that father, who in the sight of God is perhaps far better than we are; believing ourselves to be like St Michael the Archangel, placing his foot on the head of Lucifer because he rose up against God; and considering our brother as an adverse spirit simply because he does not approve of our opinion, which, however good it may seem, can never be more than our own private judgment. Now this odious epithet of obstinate is not befitting any ordinary Christian, much less a priest or brother of the Congregation, obstinacy being essentially a diabolical quality; and therefore we ought to put in practice the words, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt,"¹⁹ if we do not wish to destroy the spirit which St Philip has breathed into us, which is the spirit of charity.

Nevertheless I do not condemn our expressing our opinion with all the force of our reasons for it, especially when there is anything essential at stake; as, for instance, maintaining the strict observance of some point of our rule in its first vigour; on the contrary, in such a case

¹⁸Rom. xiv. 5.

¹⁹Matt. xxvi. 39.

we should follow the example of Father Consolini, who laid aside his usual gentleness and sweetness, and acted not *in spiritu lenitatis*, but *in spiritu vehementi* [not in the spirit of gentleness, but in the spirit of rigour], when there was a question of carrying out what appeared to him to be the intention of St Philip. Otherwise it would be of very great prejudice to the Institute, if, for fear of offending one or two, to whom a certain rule may not be pleasing, it were to be allowed to fall into disuse. But I must say that sometimes it may be an act of holy prudence to overlook some want of observance, in order the better to strengthen the rule by waiting for a more propitious time, so as to avoid injuring charity, which, if it be once extinguished, is not easily relit. In other things, however, which do not concern the rule, yielding 94 at the proper time and place is a wonderful secret for maintaining charity, which is the first of all rules. And the same Father Consolini, who was called the beloved disciple of St Philip, was most particular in never allowing charity to be infringed for any other good we might think to do; hence, writing to one of our fathers, he says: "*Esteem the peace and union of the house above all other things*;" and he urges that for the maintenance of charity each one should endeavour to yield even to his inferiors, after having modestly and charitably said what he thinks, *in Domino*. This was the practice of Father Zenobio Gherardi, of the Congregation of the Oratory of Florence, a man of great purity and goodness, and most exact in the observance of the Institute. Although he might be in some matters of an opposite opinion to the others, when he saw that the greater part of the fathers were of another mind, he always sided with the majority, giving up his own will to maintain peace in his Congregation and to avoid factions and divisions. This is indeed to be a lover of charity!

11. *In the recreations which take place twice a day, in the morning after dinner and in the evening after supper, in order to refresh our minds and the better to foster charity, to ask from God the four first fruits of the Holy Spirit: charity, joy, peace, and patience.* Here most assuredly charity is fostered by that open and general communication of our thoughts to all, as we do not speak privately to one another. The one relates a noble action, the other some piece of news, a third some 95 interesting point of doctrine, a fourth some witty anecdote, always, however, within the bounds of modesty, and all hear them and enjoy them. Just as friendship between people in the world arises from

mutual intercourse, so with us charity is nurtured by this recreation in common, and if perchance before that time there had been some little word wanting in sweetness or respect, or some shadow of suspicion between two fathers or two brothers (who make their recreation apart), this speaking in common sometimes gives an opportunity for the one to address the other who has been offended, or whom he suspects of having been so, and everything is immediately cleared away; or perhaps some other father, perceiving the little disagreement which has arisen between those two fathers, with some delicate management or some adroit question gets them to talk together, and all is set right without any difficulty. Wherefore one of our fathers used to say, "*Hora recreationis vinculum Congregationis, charitatis, et perfectionis.*" [The hour of recreation is the bond of the Congregation, of charity, of perfection.]

96 Here also there is need of more patience than would readily be believed. As at this time all are free to speak without waiting to be asked, the conversation of one father may not perhaps suit the tastes of all. One will begin to speak, and another would wish to say something, but politeness prevents his interrupting him or humility suggests to him to yield; one will speak on learned or speculative subjects, and another would prefer speaking on matters of devotion; one wishes to propose cases of conscience, and another will say, "This requires too much application; I would rather say witty things, provided they are modest, to divert myself." One likes to laugh, another is of a different disposition; and in these and other similar cases patience is certainly needed. By that patience, charity and peace are maintained, and moreover we acquire joy, that *jubilus cordis* [jubilation of heart] of which St Bernard speaks, and which we experience when we surrender our own will for the sake of charity and the satisfaction of others.

12. *Finally, not to engage in works of external charity unless we have first fulfilled internal and domestic charity.* For instance, if a father were to forego visiting his sick brothers in order to go and visit the sick in the hospital; or were to refuse to preach for another father who was prevented, in order to employ this time in the service of some secular friend in his temporal affairs; if a lay-brother were to omit serving one of the fathers in his needs in order to attend to some extern; or if a father were to be invited, or should cause himself to be invited, to preach frequently in other churches, and in the meantime neglect

preaching in the church of the Congregation or in the Little Oratory, or omit to fulfil his offices. The Congregation delights in serving all, to the utmost of its power, without sparing itself; and when one of its subjects has talents, and health, and strength to preach in other churches or to do other works of charity elsewhere, without its interfering with his duties at home, it is well content, and the Superior will readily give permission; but when this is prejudicial to the well-being 97 of the Congregation or to its functions, he will refuse leave, and with good reason. Observe what St Paul says: "If any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he is worse than an infidel."²⁰ The holy Apostle does not forbid our serving others, but wishes that each one should apply himself first of all to the care of his own household. Otherwise he declares that he has denied the faith. Therefore I say that it is not forbidden to a subject of the Congregation to do good and holy works outside the Congregation, either in the city or beyond it, as occasions offer, since we have the example of our holy Father, who, not content with what he did for his own Congregation, performed works so great and so useful to the whole world. Indeed, a true son of St Philip ought to have the most ardent desire to sanctify the whole world if he could, and to do all that lies in his power for the spiritual good of all. But if the fulfilment of these external works were to interfere with the obligations imposed by the Institute, and with the services he owes to his own Congregation, then we might say he is worse than an infidel; for in order to serve others he neglects to serve the Congregation, his mother, and to help the other subjects, who are his brothers; and assuredly he would not be doing the will of God if he fails in that to which he is bound by his vocation.

III.

These twelve maxims contain the principal points necessary for the 98 acquisition and preservation of charity, the especial Excellence of the Congregation; and we ought to render endless praises to God that by His great mercy and most special assistance this charity has always been maintained in our Congregations. They are peculiarly based upon this virtue, because it is the most essential rule left us by St Philip, whose heart was the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, who is charity. This is

²⁰ 1 Tim. v. 8.

the solid pillar which should support them, and if it were to fail, they would soon fall to the ground. If two subjects of the Congregation were to have some dispute between them (unless it were something momentary and passing, which would be no matter of surprise since we are but men), the Congregation would immediately apply a fitting remedy. If, however, they should still continue their strife, it would without fail dismiss them, or they themselves, being free, would depart of their own accord. In religious Orders disputes are easily settled: the Superiors send one to France and the other to Spain, or one to Rome and the other to Naples. In our Congregation this cannot be done, and it consequently lies under the necessity of dismissing those subjects who will not live in peace.

99 If, however, the Congregation itself should become divided into two factions through a breach of charity, it would fall at once from its proper state; but, through the grace of God, this seems somewhat difficult, as we have remedies against it. Congregations are held, and all is decided by the majority of votes; the greater number gains the day, and the minority must hold their peace and not raise further discussions. In one case alone can the minority gain the upper hand, and that is, supposing the majority wished to constrain the Congregation to make vows or promises contrary to the rules laid down in the Institute, and thus to fall away from its proper state. Then the latter, the majority of the fathers, might enter some religious Order, if that were more to their taste, whilst the minority would enjoy all the possessions of the Congregation if they persevered in its normal state, without any obligation of giving the others any portion of them. It is therefore most advantageous to our subjects to remain always united in charity and thus to enjoy that great Excellence which God has granted to our holy Institute for His glory, for the benefit of our neighbour, and for the advancement of our own perfection and sanctity. Woe to those subjects who, through want of charity, should disturb the peace which is enjoyed in the earthly paradise of our Congregation! They would force God to drive them forth as He drove forth Adam. Happy those who shall strive to burn with the beautiful fire of charity which filled the heart of our holy Father! They are certain to enjoy a foretaste of Paradise here on earth, and will also render themselves worthy to enjoy the eternal Paradise hereafter.

IV.

Now, passing from the charity which the fathers and brothers of the 100
 Congregation ought to exercise among themselves in the interior of
 the house, I must add that they are also bound to exercise it externally,
 and in many ways, for the benefit of their neighbour. And in this we
 shall see how charity is an especial and most valuable excellence of our
 Congregation. It is not limited or restricted to any particular class,
 state, or nation, but it opens its arms to all, and loves all, making no
 distinction between neighbours and strangers, friend and foe, when
 the individual or public good requires it. It is ready for all, hastens to
 serve all, rich or poor, noble or peasant, and in loving and doing good
 to all without distinction and without sparing itself, looks only to the
 nature, the brotherhood, and the image of God, which we all have in
 common. Such is the charity which our holy Father Philip strove to
 imprint on our hearts;—such must it be if we wish to be able to call
 it one of our most special Excellences.

To descend to details: In order to exercise charity towards our
 neighbour, the Institute obliges us to be present in the Confessional
 principally on all Sundays and feasts of the year, as well as on Saturdays
 and some other day of each week, from early morning to the hour of
 dinner: *a prima luce ad horam usque prandii*. Nor does it allow us to
 leave it without some legitimate cause or absolute necessity. And on 101
 other week-days it prescribes that one confessor at least shall always
 be present, to wait for sinners passing by, who may require to purify
 their souls with the Sacrament of Penance. Through this untiring as-
 sistance in the Confessional St Philip won innumerable souls to God;
 and experience proves that by this means many souls are gained and
 large draughts of fish taken; and many sinners who, perhaps, would
 not have confessed before Easter, seeing a father sitting in the Con-
 fessional, reading a book or saying office or his beads, attracted by so
 good an opportunity, make their confession with great profit and spir-
 itual consolation. And this assiduous attendance in the sacred tribunal
 is not only adapted and efficacious for converting sinners, but also for
 preserving the innocent. As we never leave our Congregation for an-
 other, like regulars, who change from one convent to another, it is easy
 for a penitent to preserve his innocence who from early youth begins
 to confess to one father and never leaves him, but remains under his
 direction for thirty, forty, and fifty years; and we find in practice that

those souls who frequent the Sacraments, always obeying their own confessor and following his advice, not only preserve their innocence, but make great progress in virtue and perfection.

102 The Institute also prescribes that not only on feast-days, but also on week-days, with the exception of Saturday, a familiar discourse be preached in church for the space of half-an-hour, and on feasts for a little longer. It even prescribes four sermons on week-days, one after the other. If this is not observed in all the Congregations, it is from the want of subjects, who are not sufficiently numerous to provide for everything, or from the want of a fitting audience. Moreover, every Sunday in the Oratory, where the secular brothers of the Little Oratory assemble, after some portion of a spiritual book has been read aloud, followed by half-an-hour of mental prayer and the appointed vocal prayers, the Father Prefect, or another in his place, preaches a sermon of half-an-hour on the Gospel of the day, and at the end gives out the names of the brothers who are ill, in order that they may be visited by the others, and particularly by those who holds the office of visitors, and then seven are drawn by lot to visit one of the seven churches enriched by holy indulgences, and three to visit the hospitals; although on feast-days many are wont to go together to perform this work of charity.²¹

103 To imitate their holy Father, the priests of the Oratory also occupy themselves continually, as every one knows, in visiting prisons, hospitals, and the sick in their own homes, and especially their own penitents; in appeasing dissensions, putting an end to lawsuits, restoring peace to discordant families; in short, labouring incessantly for the good of souls and for the interests of others, without regard for their own. Whatever we leave for the love of God and of our neighbour will come back to us twofold in due season; and hence they forego, when necessary, their ease and rest, their honour, health, and life itself, to help their neighbour in his necessities, to console him in his afflictions, and to supply his wants. And although they ought to devote themselves to mental prayer at certain times, they are not so attached to it as to make any difficulty in interrupting it or leaving it when called to perform works of charity for their neighbour. Christ our

²¹ There is a tradition at Naples that while all were assembled in the Oratory for the prayer in common, two angels appeared, and, taking the form of two noble youths, scattered sweet flowers over those present.

Lord interrupted His prayer three times in one single night to arouse His disciples, who were asleep. St Philip was so absorbed in heavenly contemplation that, to avoid being disturbed, he went on to the roof of the house to pray; but as soon as he was summoned by the porter or sacristan to serve souls who wished to make their confession or to ask his advice, he immediately came down, without keeping any one waiting, although urgent business would not otherwise have induced him to do so. It is no great matter, therefore, if we interrupt or leave our prayer when it is necessary in order to arouse souls fallen asleep in the lethargy of sin or the slumber of tepidity. Indeed, we must be ready to leave even the spiritual sweetnesses which we may enjoy in recollection that we may be able to say with the Apostle: "As I also in all things please all men, not seeking that which is profitable to myself, but to many, that they may be saved."²² Or, like St Bernard to his monks: "I have hardly an hour free or unoccupied for my own repose, so many are those who come to treat of their affairs with me; but I do not complain, nor use the power I possess in order to remain in recollection; I satisfy them, for I them I shall serve my God, since I shall live in charity not feigned but true; esteeming what is for their good to be for my own advantage."

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Nor is it a valid excuse to say that there are others who are bound to do this: the good Samaritan did not let slip the opportunity because others had neglected it, and although the priest and the Levite had passed by without pitying or helping the poor wounded man fallen into the hands of robbers, he nevertheless stopped and interrupted his journey to procure him help. We must not neglect such occasions when God sends them to us. If any one were to come across a large piece of gold left by the wayside, would he not immediately pick it up without stopping to ask why that man did not take it who passed before? Good God! what gold is so precious as a soul? What treasure will enrich us so much as winning it to God? Although, in order that we may not fall into the other extreme of helping others to our own injury, our Lord has left us this great maxim: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?"²³

Neither would it be a good excuse to be afraid of shortening our lives by the fatigues of study, sermons, confessions, or assisting the sick

²² 1 Cor. x. 33.

²³ Matt. xvi. 26.

105 and dying, and under this pretext to shrink from them as being likely to hasten our death. I would ask such a one whether he would consider it a misfortune in travelling through a foreign country to make use of a short cut which would bring him home sooner to his native land? How then can it be esteemed a misfortune for evangelical labourers to enter betimes on the possession of that glory which their Divine Master has merited for them by His sufferings and death? Do we perchance fear lest that should happen to us which we cannot sufficiently desire, and which is always too long delayed? God forbid that priests of the Oratory should fear illness or an early death when it is a question of labouring for the souls for whom Jesus Christ did not hesitate to die. Charity is their most special Excellence, which leads them to live together in the same house in great brotherly love, union, and peace, and also impels them to many labours for the spiritual benefit of their neighbour. This is which will make them rich in merit and worthy of very much glory.

V.

And let not the brothers of the Congregation think that only the priests can acquire such merits on earth and such glory in heaven, but let them rest assured that they also may become sharers, if they will, in the same merit and the same glory, and even sometimes greater, if they know how to set about it. They also may enjoy this beautiful Excellence of
 106 charity if they practise it as they ought, according to their state and capacity. Let the lay-brothers read "The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection," that golden book, so useful for all, composed by Father Alphonso Rodriguez, of the Society of Jesus, and they will find that he speaks in this way:—We all form one body, one Congregation; the aim of this body is, not only that each one should attend to himself and to his own perfection, but that he should also attend to the salvation and perfection of his neighbour. Now to be able to attain to this particular aim of our Congregation, it is necessary that some be preachers and confessors, and some coadjutors to help the others in the external duties. To be victorious in warfare, it is necessary that some fight and that others remain in charge of the baggage, and these help the others to fight and gain the laurels, and deserve no less reward than those who fight; as David said: "Equal shall be the portion of him that went down to battle and of him that abode at the

baggage.”²⁴ And most justly, since they all form one single army: the former are as necessary for gaining the victory as the latter, because the combatants would not have been able to fight if the others had not remained in charge of the things left in the camp. It is the same with us: we all form one body, one squadron of soldiers of Christ, one Congregation for the great enterprise of the conversion and sanctification of souls; and this one could not preach nor that one hear confessions, nor a third study, if thee were not some one to take charge of the temporal 107 affairs. And therefore he who helps in this way helps also in preaching, hearing confessions, and saving souls, and has his share in the fruit of the victory which is gained. And thus even by the most lowly and humble offices, by washing the dishes and cooking the dinner, he converts souls to God, and participates in all the good works which are done in the whole Congregation. And the reason is clear, since the cook, the porter, the sacristan, the infirmarian, the purveyor, or the refectory brother, all contribute to the end of the Congregation, all have their part in it; it suffices that in their labours they should try to have the pure intention of serving God and souls when they are serving the Congregation by fulfilling the offices assigned to them, or serving the individual fathers when they stand in need of their aid.

The brothers can also share in the work for souls by conversing familiarly with their neighbour and speaking with him on holy things. Who can tell how much fruit was produced by Brother Giovanni Battista Guerra, who lived in the time of the holy Father? He always had in his hand some little books of devotion, which he used to make people read. He spoke of God, he related anecdotes of the Saints, and all with so much grace that many sought him out to listen to him, especially youths, whom he used to remind of the saying of St Philip, that they should be joyous and keep free from sin. When he was porter, he served with great charity all who came, and took care that they were quickly attended to; but for the poor he seemed to have a still 108 more special care, and greater readiness in consoling them, and he never allowed any to go away without receiving all possible satisfaction. It is related of Brother Maccaluffi, also of the Roman Oratory, that when he was sacristan, he was most zealous for the observance of perfect modesty in the house of God and he used to correct the irreverent, sometimes gently and sometimes severely; and when this did

²⁴I Kings xxx. 24.

not suffice, he would take them by the arm and with a holy boldness turn them out of the church, always preserving unalterable sweetness. Brother Egidio Calvelli, of the same Congregation, accompanied all his actions with a holy charity, and to draw all men to well-doing, he used to condescend to all to the utmost of his power, consoling them with kind and holy words, and taking care that they were served by the fathers in their confessions and communions. There are many brothers of our Congregations who have been remarkable for procuring the salvation of souls by speaking familiarly of the things of God; amongst others, the Venerable Brother Dionisio Pieragostini, of the Congregation of Camerino, who succeeded not only in converting depraved men, but even a great number of women of bad life, placing them all in a monastery which his zeal found the means of erecting; but for the sake of brevity I will not mention any more.

109 The conversion of sinners also lies within the power of the brothers by means of their prayers; and sometimes the conversion of a soul, which some father thinks he has effected by his sermon, may be the fruit of the tears, prayers, and penances of the porter or the cook. The brothers may, therefore, console themselves, for they too can assist in so many ways in the salvation of souls, which great work is the sole aim of the Congregation; and this consolation should be all the greater since they run no risk of vanity, as preachers do; they are in no danger of making mistakes or of being tormented by doubts, as are confessors, and thus their merit is more sure; they stand to win and not to lose. But if they wish to make sure of this gain and this merit, they must not fail to exercise charity, which is the principal rule of the institute. In the first place, they must fulfil their own offices without disputes or strife amongst themselves, doing everything in holy peace. In the second place, they must serve the priests, who labour in the vineyard of the Lord, looking upon themselves as instruments necessary to their labour, and with the holy intention of co-operating in their preaching and in the administration of the Sacraments. In the third place, when it does not interfere with their work for the community, let them charitably help the fathers in their special needs, for they are very often in want of many services which they cannot perform for themselves on account of their important and constant occupations; and particularly when they are ill, they should serve them with the greatest care, that they may be sooner restored to health, and able to labour anew for

their neighbour; mindful also that when they themselves are ill, the 110
priests do not disdain to wait upon them, there being always at least
one priest for infirmarian, besides the brothers.

Let them take for example Brother Taddeo Landi, of Florence, a
man of tried virtue, of few words, and above all others a lover of toil.
He acted upon the maxim that by right all the hard and menial work
of the house was due to him alone, and hence he not only willingly
embraced the tasks imposed upon him by his office, but it was his
custom never to refuse his assistance to any one who sought it. Indeed,
he was wont, when asked, to leave his own occupations to employ
himself in helping others, making up afterwards for the interruption
of his own work by depriving himself of sleep and rest for a great part
of the night.

And if it should seem to them that they are overburdened with
work, let them remember Brother Ximines of the Society of Jesus. As
he lived in a college that was very poor, he was obliged to attend to its
property, to dig the ground, to cultivate the garden, and to do much
hard labour. Going home in the evening, he would say to himself:
“Supposing, when you get home, tired as you are, you were ordered
to wash the dishes before going to bed and to rest, what would you
do?” And he answered: “Oh! they will not do that, for the fathers
know very well how tired and worn out you are.” “But suppose they
were to tell you this, seeing there is no one else to do it?” “Well,” he
would answer, “it must be done all the same.” And many a time it so
happened.

111

The Congregation takes brothers that they may work, and al-
though it is most discreet in not laying upon them burdens above their
strength, yet extraordinary fatigues cannot sometimes be avoided. But
this happens also to the priests, either through sermons, or confes-
sions, or other important affairs which sometimes oblige them to pass
whole nights without taking any rest. And if the priests have on like
occasions to do themselves, so to speak, some violence and not to be
afraid of some over-fatigue, why should the brothers fear it? The whole
point lies in doing everything with charity, because this supplies us
with courage and strength for all things. Charity it was which gave
the Saviour of the world strength to die amidst so many sufferings on
the cross for our salvation, and charity will give us also strength to un-
dergo all necessary labour for His glory. Since this is a great and noble

Excellence of our Congregation, let us turn it to our own profit, and console ourselves with the thought that as charity is our primary and principal rule, if we practise it in the ways which I have been explaining, we have fulfilled our whole Institute, according to the saying of the Apostle St Paul, that "He that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law."²⁵

²⁵Rom. xiii. 8.

CHAPTER 4

THE FOURTH EXCELLENCE

INTERIOR MORTIFICATION

The spirit of interior mortification, which may be called the fifth element of the inheritance bequeathed by our holy Founder, Philip Neri, to his sons, may well be considered another supreme Excellence of the Congregation. He said that the perfection of a Christian consists in mortifying himself for the love of Jesus Christ; and that exterior mortifications greatly assist in the acquisition of interior mortification and of other virtues; but that without the latter we can do nothing. It was his maxim that a man who could not endure the loss of his honour could make no progress in spiritual things. Hence he laid such stress on the necessity of using every effort to mortify the intellect, that he was accustomed to say: "*The sanctity of man lies within the space of three fingers;*" and, while he said it, he would touch his forehead, and add, in explanation of his words: "*The whole point lies in mortifying the understanding* (an expression very familiar to him, meaning by the understanding all excessive use of the intellect), *and not pretending to be wise and to reason about everything, since perfection consists in leading captive our own will and following that of our superiors.*" And he used to declare to his sons that he set no great value on fasts, disciplines, and hair-shirts, in which there is always something of our own will; but that they must bridle the understanding, even in small things, if they aspired to overcome in great ones and to advance in virtue. So that if anyone was brought to him who had a reputation for sanctity, he was wont to try him, and if he found him truly mortified, he would hold him in esteem; if otherwise, in suspicion. 112

Thus, although he was so strict with himself that in the matter of fasts, disciplines, hair-shirts, and other penances he rivalled the most illustrious penitents, yet, foreseeing that all his sons would not be able to bear the burthen of so much application and so many works of charity for their neighbour if they at the same time practised great 113

114 austerities, he imposed on them no fasts beyond those commanded by Holy Church, and he was satisfied with their taking the discipline three times a week in the Oratory; but with regard to interior mortification, he always devoted himself to practising it, and making others practise it. He wished that each one of his disciples should be firmly and generously resolved to mortify himself in all things, desiring to die to himself and all created things, in order to live solely for God and to find in Him alone peace and repose. For as nature has great repugnance to and fear of such a mortification as undergoing a little humiliation, abjection, and contempt, esteeming it a very heavy cross, which grows more terrible the more we fly from it, so there is great prudence and merit in offering ourselves manfully to carry it from the beginning with courage and vigour; since, as the Saviour says, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent bear it away,"¹ not by conquering others, but by triumphing over themselves and putting to death their self-love. Thus, by this one death they escape a thousand other deaths which those suffer who love the world or themselves and their own immortalized wills, and they acquire the peace and joy in which the kingdom of God consists. As the martyrs (of whom the Church sings, *Mortis sacrae compendio vitam beatam possident* [at the price of a holy death, they possess a life of bliss]) by the short road of a good death possess eternal rest, so do the just by the short death of self-abnegation acquire that peace and repose enjoyed even on earth by those who are truly mortified. For upon the root of this death grace is wont to engraft a branch which produces fruits of life, and by the *quotidie morior* [I die every day]² of the Apostle, and the entire victory over their passions, they will enjoy a life far beyond all other lives.

I.

115 Hence you clearly see that true mortification does not consist in unnerving or oppressing the body, nor in suffering terrible pains, nor in crippling the senses, but principally in controlling and subjecting to God our heart, our will, and our passions, which wage war against the spirit; in bridling anger, so as to become gentle; in restraining curiosity to gain recollection; in patiently suffering injuries and temporal

¹Matt. xi. 12.

²1 Cor. xv. 31.

adversities—for instance, poverty, the deaths of relations and friends; in bearing not only the burthens and imperfections of others, but also ourselves and our own imperfections, which we are unable to put away and amend as quickly as we desire; in tolerating the habits of others which are contrary to our own; in short in bearing with all, at all times, and on all occasions which may appear to us troublesome or distasteful. It consists likewise in curbing all desire for honour, in patiently suffering contempt, nay, in forcing ourselves to wish for it, and even now and then to seek it out and rejoice in it. The same holds good with regard to the other passions, such as an inordinate desire for ostentation, luxuries, or delicate food, and for doing all things according to our own wishes and tastes. Finally, it consists in the endeavour, with the help of God, to gain the mastery over all our passions, and ever to advance in habits of virtue, which enable us joyfully and easily to do whatever we know to be the will of God, giving up our own will and overcoming all inclinations contrary to the Divine will, even so far as to deprive ourselves of heavenly consolations when the service of God or of souls requires it, thus leaving God for God. In this manner the Saints have understood and practised the self-denial which Jesus Christ preached; and the sacred commentators explain that this is precisely what is meant by taking up our cross and following Him, *abneget semetipsum, tollat crucem suam et sequatur me* [let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me].³ 116

II.

Our holy Founder, St Philip, in imitation of our Divine Lord, *cæpit facere et docere* [began to do and teach]⁴ he began by practising and then went on to teach these truths. His whole life, we may say, was one perpetual interior mortification. When still young, instead of enjoying the magnificence and the wonders which are to be seen in Rome, he spent ten consecutive years, as if buried, in the Catacombs of St Sebastian, conversing only with God. Having been ordained priest, and appointed to hear confessions, he became all things to all men, and found his only enjoyment and rest in labouring unceasingly for souls; in recompense for which he underwent, during several years, continual

³ Matt. xvi. 24.

⁴ Acts i. 1.

persecutions, mockery, contempt, calumnies, and public and severe reproofs from persons of note, and even from the Vicar of the Pope, who had been misinformed concerning him. He never complained of these by no means trifling mortifications, but considered all their bitterness as a delicious beverage, saying that when he had been well mortified God would cause these persecutions to cease.

117 When afterwards disciples gathered round him, fearing the esteem of men, he devised a thousand strange ways of bringing contempt of himself, and so mortifying every possible inclination to appear of importance in the eyes of the world. Hence he was often seen to jump about in the rooms of great personages, to dance in the market-places, to run in the public squares, and often to appear with half his beard shaved, and his clothes wrong side out in the midst of the most frequented thoroughfares, or with a cushion on his head in a crowded church. At one time he would go out walking dressed in white satin or in fine furs, carrying in his hand a shabby nosegay of broom, and doing all manner of strange things. At other times he would read trivial stories, keep in his own room ridiculous books, and show them to distinguished visitors, repeat fables, carry dishes of vegetables to the table of Cardinals, and eat them in their presence. Thus did St Philip sacrifice the honour that is founded on the esteem of others. The result was that, to his joy, many no longer held him to be a great man, a Saint working miracles, but deemed him a man of no sense or judgment and of consummate folly. This is, indeed, a very delicate interior mortification, nay, the very deepest artifice of humility, and the deed of a man truly detached from self.

118 And yet he found a still further refinement of mortification. He was so absorbed in heavenly contemplations and in the enjoyment of God, that he was almost always in ecstasy, incapable of reciting the Divine Office, celebrating Mass, or hearing confessions; he could no longer preach, listen to business, nor answer questions. At the same time his ardent zeal urged him to work great things for the service of his neighbour. What shall he do, or rather what can he do, to rid himself of such an impediment? With admirable ingenuity he puts away everything which can remind him of God, his love. He distracts himself by sheer force and of set purpose by having trivial or humorous books read to him, and even recommends himself to the prayers of others, to obtain distractions. But what a grief and what a mortification must

not this have been for a burning, loving seraph like Philip! To detach himself, as it were, entirely from God, and after having sacrificed all that is most desirable in the order of nature, namely, honour, to go further and sacrifice also, for the salvation of our neighbour, what is most to be desired in the order of grace, giving up, not only the enjoyment of God, but I may say, even God Himself for His love; saying, with the holy spouse of the Canticles, *Fuge, dilecte mi* [flee away, my beloved]: this is indeed a deep and penetrating mortification, affecting both the intellect and the will.

This proves that the spirit of mortification was the spirit of the holy Father; this it is which he always required from his children, considering it as a most singular Excellence of his Institute, capable of making them Saints, if they know how to cultivate it. He often practised them in extravagant mortifications, to keep them humble and lowly, and to uproot all self-esteem and attachment to their own reputation. It would take volumes to enumerate them all, but I will content myself with relating a few for our instruction. He would sometimes send his penitents, even noblemen, to beg alms at the church doors, or to ask 119 for bread at the houses of the laity, and once he sent one who was taking pride in a new suit of clothes to St Mary Major to ask for charity, sending others at the same time to mock and reprove him. Some he made wear large spectacles, generally young men, when he sent them on messages about the city. He gave others a bell to ring in the most frequented thoroughfares, that they might be hooted and treated as madmen. He would make some eat pancakes walking through Rome. One he caused to wear a hair-shirt outside his coat; another to carry a large dog under his arm; another to wear a fur pelisse over his cassock through three whole months of summer. One to wear a fur cloak wrong side out; another to bear the cross before the dead at funerals. He would refuse for a long time permission to receive Holy Communion or to say Mass. And he insisted on one father preaching the same sermon six times consecutively, without changing a single word; and in these mortifications he exercised not merely boys and youths, but priests, learned men, and illustrious personages, already of mature age.

His two first and dearest sons, Father Cesare Baronio and Father Francesco Maria Tarugi, were mortified by him more severely than any others. He gave the former to understand, when the Pope had sent him some money with which to continue the Ecclesiastical Annals, that

120 ought to pay his pension to the Congregation like the other fathers, being no longer able to allege the excuse of poverty; and because he was unwilling to do so, having continually to spend money in copying the MSS. of the Vatican, and paying writers to help him in his great work, the holy Father told him resolutely that he should either pay his pension or leave. *Aut pareat, aut abeat* [let him either obey or depart]: since God has no need of man. When, however, Baronio humbly knelt at his feet, and asked pardon for his resistance, offering him everything without reserve, the Saint said to him, "Now thou hast done what was necessary; go, I want nothing of thine, and learn another time to give thyself up to obedience."

Father Tarugi, (who was nephew of Cardinal Di Porto and cousin of Pope Julius III., and who was, moreover, illustrious on account of the important and successful missions intrusted to him by the Sovereign Pontiffs), seems one day not to approve entirely of some act of which the holy Father was speaking, thinking it inconsistent with prudence, and St Philip drove him from his presence and forbade him to appear again before him, as if he had committed some grave fault. This he did so naturally that poor Tarugi, full of confusion and shame, believed that he was really angry with him: hence, more grieved than Absalom when he was forbidden by David his father to see his face, he most urgently begged some of the fathers to intercede for him; but Philip proved inexorable. Not knowing what more to do, Tarugi went to each father in succession, in the hope that among so many he might
121 find at least one who would be successful. But the Saint replied to all supplications with assumed bitterness, "Let him remain as he is." At last, he gave them to understand that if their entreaties proceeded from the humbled heart of Tarugi rather than from their own charity, they might tell him to come and plead his cause in person. At this message, the loving son ran to throw himself at the feet of his beloved father with abundance of tears and compunction, and was pressed by him to his bosom, and thus recompensed for his past affliction with overflowing consolation; and the Saint himself said to Father Consolini confidentially: "You would not believe to what a degree of merit Tarugi has arrived from having undergone this keen mortification."

III.

This then is the true spirit of St Philip, the spirit of interior mortification, and he has left this spirit as an inheritance to his Congregations, which should consider it one of their greatest Excellences, making their road towards holiness secure. It is true that although the Congregations by the grace of God still persevere in the holy observance of this institute, those especially which have a sufficient number of subjects, they may not perhaps always keep the same fervent spirit of mortification as in the time of the holy Father himself; but we must remember that all have not the discernment of spirits for administering suitable mortifications which St Philip had. He knew so well who was capable of them and who was not, that he never ordered any mortification without its being accepted and producing the desired fruit. There were some who had lived thirty or forty years with him whom he never mortified in any way, either in word or deed; others, on the contrary, were hardly in his hands before he made them do the most extraordinary things. It must be said, however, that if the spirit of mortification is no longer so strict or so general as during the life of the holy Father, it is nevertheless maintained with great care, and great store is laid by it. In proof of this, it is sufficient to read the Historical Memoirs of the Oratory by Father Marciano of the Neapolitan Congregation; he shows in the lives of many fathers and brothers of different Congregations, who were remarkable for perfection and holiness, that in all the houses and at all times interior mortification has been practised with special care, and that it continues to be practised with much fervour. 122

We need but allude to the memorable mortification imposed by Father Francesco Amadeo Ormea, Provost of the Oratory of Turin, on the Venerable Father Sebastian Valfrè. This good father had proposed to go to Rome for the Holy Year of 1675. He asked and obtained from the Superior and the Congregation of Deputies the permission needed by any one who desires to remain absent for more than a month. Before setting out he went to present his respects to the Royal family, who held him in great esteem, and to take leave of many persons of note and various acquaintances with his usual urbanity and kindness. On the morning of his departure, many gentlemen and ecclesiastics, chiefly his own penitents, came to the Oratory in order to accompany him to the banks of the River Po, on which he was about to embark. He went to receive the blessing of Father Ormea, his Superior, who 123

embraced him tenderly, asked his prayers, and gave him a note, telling him to read it just before starting. Having arrived at the place of embarkation, and placed his luggage on the boat, before setting foot in it, in obedience to his Superior's command, he opened the note, in which he read these words: "*Father Valfrè will return home immediately.*" Without being the least discomposed, but with a tranquil and smiling countenance, he said: "Come now, gentlemen, I must return home to the city in your company." In the meantime Father Ormea had prepared people to jeer at him about his journey, so that many congratulated him in jest on his happy return, and this joke lasted several days. Such a mortification cannot be called a light one, since we all know how ardently we look forward to a journey which we have been long planning. Moreover, this venerable father was to see the capital of Christendom, to kneel at the feet of the Vicar of Christ, whose esteem and affection he enjoyed through his reputation of extraordinary virtue. He was to make the personal acquaintance of so many holy and learned Cardinals, who already loved him as a friend and desired to see him. He was looking forward to visiting the numerous sanctuaries, to gaining treasures of holy indulgences, and above all to venerating with filial love the glorious tomb of his holy Father, St Philip, of whom he might well be said to be a worthy copy. But Father Valfrè, who was no novice in the art of mortification, bore the sudden interruption and giving up of all this with such resignation that he never once complained, nor showed that he had felt the least displeasure; and the whole city of Turin was filled with edification.

124

IV.

Now with regard to similar mortifications which especially subdue the understanding, Superiors are wont to inflict them on their subjects, and the Novice-masters on their novices, both to try their spirit and to procure them an increase of merit; and even if the Superiors and the Prefects of novices should not be very attentive or fervent in doing this, our very rule is framed so as to supply at every step occasions for many unexpected mortifications. I do not here speak of those which are inevitable in every religious community, and which must occur at table, in the offices, or from the diversity of dispositions; for it is well known that *vita communis, mortificatio maxima* [the common life is the greatest mortification]. But I speak of certain mortifications met with in

our particular way of life, and which it is impossible to avoid without breaking the observance of our rule. For instance, it is no slight one to have to remain shut up in the confessional on all Saturdays and on days of obligation, and on certain days of each week, during a great part of the day even if no one should come to confession. Moreover, we are always liable to be summoned to the confessional any day, at any hour, however inconvenient, when perhaps we have quite other plans, wishing to study, or to take a walk, or write a letter, &c. We must be ready to go downstairs when we are called by the porter to listen to any persons who may require our services. We must say Mass at any hour and at any altar which may please the Sacristan, or go down to church to give Communion to perhaps one poor person, when we are in the very midst of the composition of a sermon or other study. We must preach in church, not on such a day or such a feast as would suit us, but when the Prefect of preachers chooses. We have to read in church, or to read and serve in the refectory, when we least expect it; because, although each one takes his turn, either by the day or the week according to custom, it very often happens that we are called upon to supply the place of a father who is accidentally absent. We may often have to read or serve at table the same evening that we are about to preach. We are bound indispensably to be present, unless legitimately prevented, every evening at the Oratory for the prayer in common, at the conferences, or at the Congregation of faults, at the consultive Congregations, and at the other functions of the community, at times when we have other intentions, or are occupied in other good works. All these things are no slight mortifications, and although they may appear trifling to those who do not experience them, it requires great virtue to receive them without annoyance or grumbling, and to adapt ourselves to everything because such is the will of God, clearly manifested to us by the rule. 125

V.

The novices, besides being more often exercised by their Prefect in various studied mortifications to imbue them with this spirit, so necessary for the acquisition of perfection, have generally, unless they be dispensed for some good reason, to undergo a very sensible mortification, which is, to abstain, at the will of their Superior, for the three years of their noviciate from every study of humanities, philosophy, 126

theology, rhetoric, morals, or composition of sermons, except the one which they are accustomed to preach in the refectory in their month of probation before beginning the novitiate. This is in order that they may learn first of all the great necessity of humility, without which the other virtues can neither be acquired nor preserved; and that they may come to rejoice in living unknown and despised: "Let them abstain from literary studies according to the will of their Superior: these must be first moderated, in order that, imbued with Divine wisdom, they may learn to love to be unknown." (Inst., cap. 7. n. 3).

127 No doubt some minds, fond of study, think the time lost which is not so spent, and feel this mortification deeply, but I will reply to them in the words of Father Balthazar Alvarez to his novices, who likewise gave up study during the two years of their novitiate. "Tell me," he was wont to say, "does he lose his time who digs deep the foundations of a lofty edifice, or he who carefully spares the horse which is to carry him on a long journey, or he who mends with care the pen which he is about to use? Study consists in understanding and penetrating into that of which we were previously ignorant. This is not done without light, and God communicates this light more abundantly to His friends who are faithful and humble, and who fulfil their duties at the appointed times, without allowing themselves to be disturbed or confused by their anxiety to perform them well. If God wills us not to study, it is enough. Let us cultivate holiness, and He will reward us in His own good time with more abundant learning. Do not let us confound the sciences, or we shall not succeed in any of them. If a man does not study grammar at the proper time, he will never speak or write correctly, and if at another time he does not study philosophy, he will never understand it. Thus, if you do not, in your novitiate, attentively study self-denial and the mortification of the understanding, and whatever most incites you to virtue, you will afterwards remain ignorant of these things. If when the heart is free and desirous of perfection, and when you have time, assistance, and many examples, you do not acquire an abundant store of virtues, what will become of you when the heart is hindered and divided, and has not the same help, but, on the contrary, many distractions and occupations? A good life 128 is the soul of learning, and if this be wanting you will be full of failings; like statues, you will have eyes but you will not see. *Qui vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum* [he who would come after me must deny

himself], are the words of Christ. Make up your minds, my brothers, to confess either that you do not wish to begin to tread the paths of perfection, or begin at once by self-denial, as the Master of life and of true wisdom teaches."

Thus spoke Father Alvarez to his novices, and I say the same things to you. My dear sons, apply yourselves seriously in these three years to mortification, even in minute things, imitating the sacred spouse, whose hands, and even the tips of whose fingers, are steeped in myrrh. Be prompt in receiving with due submission and indifference all mortifications which may be given you; otherwise you will never learn this spirit; and the mortifications which you must indispensably meet with later, either from the requirements of the rule, or of your offices, or which are destined for you by Providence, will appear to you intolerable, and from your want of habit you will find great difficulty in bearing them well. Oh! how many fathers, already decennials or old in the Congregation, perceive the grave error they committed in their noviciate, in not having studied to acquire this spirit of interior mortification; and they sigh to have back again that time which they can no longer have! They see it then—but too late; may you learn this lesson now, and ask of God light to know it well and to profit by it, that you may not have to lament the time you have wasted to your own great loss.

VI.

In order that we may all be persuaded that the spirit of interior mortification is a signal and very desirable prerogative of our Congregation and the greatest blessing that we can possess, I will suggest the principal motives for it. The first is, that the spirit of perfect prayer, which attains to treating familiarly with God, is not to be found without true and entire mortification of self, which should precede it as a disposition in order that we may pray with profit, and accompany it as a strong armour, to overcome the repugnances and difficulties which occur in prayer. The second is, that God gives more in one hour's prayer to the mortified man than in many to him who is immortified; and He gives more through the occupations in which we are placed by Him than we should gain in our leisure or in reading the writings of Saints, if we did it only to satisfy our private tastes and not under obedience. The third is, that while the spirit of mortification renders a person very

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severe towards himself, it makes him also kind and pleasant to others, and this is of the highest importance. The fourth is, that it destroys our self-love and our passions; and when these are tamed we find perfect contentment and happiness. The fifth is, that a mortified man who gives up his own comforts and pleasures, especially when there is any question of the salvation of souls; who attends unweariedly to
 130 subduing his own appetites; who does not feel vexed at biting words, insults, or other ill-usage, whether from friends or strangers, or even from his own penitents; who, in short, shows no displeasure at anything, but readily suits himself to the humours of all in that which is not sin,—such a one greatly edifies all men, and therefore his words have more authority than those of others, and make a deeper impression on the souls of those who are brought under his influence. The sixth is, that the truest and surest mortification for us lies in following the community in all things, accommodating ourselves to it in everything without singularity. This it is on which Father Pietro Consolini so much insisted, and which he repeated so often and with so much energy, saying that all should adapt themselves to the holy community life, for he who understands how to do this well may obtain great treasures of merit; whereas he who does not follow the community, but seeks singularity, beyond the cases of necessity or obedience, cannot possibly observe the rules.

He himself gave a most notable example of this, for the slightest singularity could never be detected in him. He was so devoted to abstinence that he would have desired to keep a perpetual fast, and he ate so little that it was a marvel how he could live. However, to mortify his own will and avoid all singularity, he adapted himself in the refectory to the ordinary fare in such a way that he did not interfere with the common life, and yet satisfied his cherished virtue of abstinence; for
 131 he partook of all the dishes that came to table, but ate most sparingly of each, choosing out the worst portion. And even when the food was injurious to his health he would always taste it, so great was his desire to eat of everything placed before him. All the time that the meals lasted he passed in cutting up and playing with his food, very little of which he put into his mouth. Thus with the common food he hid his abstinence, and by his abstinence he sanctified it, and was not inferior to the most abstemious anchorites or the monks who are bound to long fasts. Thus, whether in his behaviour at table, or in the furniture

of his room, in his clothes, at recreation, in short, in all things and everywhere, he avoided singularity, because he truly possessed the spirit of interior mortification.

Finally, the seventh reason is, that our holy Father, in so expressly requiring interior mortification from his sons, aimed at reforming all, and teaching them not merely to lead a life as fervent and holy as that of the early Christians, but to imitate as closely as possible the holy Apostles, nay, the very life of Jesus Christ Himself, so that his Congregation should be, not a copy of a copy, but a copy of an original. Christ had no need to reform Himself; He was holy and impeccable by nature, absolute master of His passions, without fear of being ruled by them; but He wished to reform the world, and restore it as far as possible to the state of that first world which He had created with such order and harmony; and the principal means which He used in its reformation was to inspire His Apostles with the spirit of interior mortification, 132 in order that they might afterwards reproduce it in others. Has not St John told us that "all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life"?⁵ Now to bridle such pernicious evils, the Incarnate Wisdom could find no better means than the interior mortification of the understanding. And although Christ had no need of it, He practised it Himself to set us the example; and by refusing the riches and honours of this life, He mortified Himself to such a degree that He took no pleasure for Himself: "Christ did not please Himself."⁶ To teach us to immolate self-love and its desires, He never did that which might have pleased His sacred Humanity, but only that which pleased His Eternal Father: "For I do always the things that please Him."⁷ And in saying to His Apostles, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself," He taught them to be resolute in mortifying their own will in order to do always the will of God, declaring that He had come from heaven to do this: "I came down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me."⁸

We cannot do this Divine will unless we first renounce our own, all ruined and corrupted as it is by original sin. We cannot renounce

⁵ 1 John ii. 16.

⁶ Rom. xv. 3.

⁷ John viii. 29.

⁸ John vi. 38.

133 our own will without denying and mortifying ourselves; and herein lies the strength of interior mortification, which leads to perfection.

Now, observe that all the principal instructions given by Christ to His Apostles aimed at interior mortification, that through its means they might become perfect. The Apostles understood that they had a Master of infinite wisdom, therefore being sometimes curious to know what was not fitting for them, they put many questions to Him. St Peter one day asked Him what would become of St John, of whom it had been said that he would not die. He answered: "So I will have him to remain till I come, what is it to thee?"⁹ What matter is it of thine? When Christ foretold the entire destruction of the whole world and the ruin of those latter days, the Apostles in their fear and curiosity enquired of Him: "Tell us, O Master, when shall these things be?" The Lord answered them: "Of that day and hour no one knoweth." You are too inquisitive and too presumptuous in wishing to know that which even the Angels of heaven do not know.¹⁰ It is not yours to know such things, nor am I, who am your Master, bidden to make known to you that which the Father reserves for Himself alone.¹¹ Wherefore mortify your curiosity. And He thus repulsed many other of their questions, that they might learn to mortify the understanding and superfluous speech.

134 And when He reproved them more gently, He said to them: What will you that I say to you? Supposing that I were to condescend to your pleasure at the present time, you would not be able to understand it all.¹² The time will come in which the Holy Spirit will teach you all things.¹³ But as yet the time is not come; mortify yourselves. And when the same Apostles, entering into a strife for pre-eminence, wanted to know of Christ which of them should be the greater:¹⁴ O ye proud ones, He was obliged to say to them, is this what you have learnt of me, who have so impressed upon you to be humble of heart? Can you now allow yourselves to be carried away by such pride as this? And calling unto Him a little child, He said to them: "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom

⁹ John xxi. 23.

¹⁰ Matt. xxiv. 36.

¹¹ Acts i. 7.

¹² John xvi. 12.

¹³ John xiv. 26.

¹⁴ Matt. xviii. 1.

of heaven." And at the Last Supper, when this contest was renewed among them as to who should have the supremacy over the others,¹⁵ He thus spoke to them: Do you still cherish thoughts of ambition and of vanity? The kings of the earth wish always to rule and never to be subject to others. But you who follow me must not let yourselves be overcome by such desires for pre-eminence and honour; on the contrary, you must mortify this desire of commanding, and only obey and serve after my example. "He that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is the leader as he that serveth." Mortify this spirit of ambition, for you never deserve any but the lowest place among all.

Another time His disciples presented themselves before Him somewhat elated because the devils were subject to them. Then our Lord with an air of majesty said: "I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven."¹⁶ Do you not remember how Satan fell from heaven and was cast into hell through his pride? Mortify this desire to be esteemed by men holy and workers of miracles. Another time, because the Samaritans had not been willing to receive our Lord into their city, filled with indignation they asked Him to bring down fire from heaven to consume them,¹⁷ and our Lord reproved them severely, saying, "You know not of what spirit you are." This is no good zeal which wishes to destroy a city, but it is a spirit of anger and vengeance; moderate this anger and mortify it. Thus you see that this spirit of mortification was taught by Christ to His disciples on many occasions as the principal foundation of sanctity. And it was the desire of St Philip that his sons should be imbued with this spirit—that it should be their food, their very life. If they live in this spirit they will attain to holiness, otherwise they need not hope for it; for without this spirit it is impossible to observe the rules of the Institute, as it is impossible to obey the Gospel. Happy are the Congregations of St Philip if they study to maintain alive this spirit of mortification as their most cherished Excellence! If they should ever lose it, they will no longer be Congregations of St Philip.

¹⁵ Luke xxii. 24.

¹⁶ Luke x. 18.

¹⁷ Luke ix. 54.

CHAPTER 5

THE FIFTH EXCELLENCE

OBEDIENCE

All the religious Orders are founded on the virtue of obedience, by which the door is shut against all the ills which Adam by his disobedience introduced into the world. Without this solid foundation they would soon totter and fall. Our Congregation also enjoys this Excellence of obedience, which is of so great merit and necessity; and it enjoys it in such a special manner as to excite the admiration of the world. Although our fathers and lay-brothers make no vow of obedience, as do religious, they are nevertheless no way inferior in the perfection of this virtue to those who profess it in the cloister with solemn vows. They supply the want of vows with love, with voluntary promptitude, and perfection in obeying every wish of the Superior. And it is a thing for which we must indeed thank God, that without the obligation of obeying under pain of sin, without fear of restraint or other punishment (except that of expulsion in case of contumacy), all the subjects, not only the novices and triennials, but also the decennials, even the oldest in the Congregation, who may have been accustomed formerly to command others in the world, are prompt in this obedience, even in things most humiliating and severe, according to the terms of the rule. All take pleasure in meeting the wishes of the Superior on every occasion with entire dependence on him, and in practising blindly and exactly all the resolutions and decrees of the Congregation. They all know that it was the mind of the holy Founder that each of his sons should either obey exactly or leave his Congregation. *Aut pareat, aut abeat* [let him either obey or depart]. And he was right in being so resolute on this point; for obedience is not only the mother and guardian of all the other virtues, as St Bernard calls it, and the shortest road to Paradise, according to St Teresa, but without it a congregation of men, always free even till their death, could not possibly exist.

I.

Philip well understood this, and although he was so gentle and sparing in his commands, he still would have himself obeyed with promptitude and exactness in that kind manner of his (which by the grace of God has continued to this day in his Congregations); so that Cardinal Tarugi did not hesitate to affirm, that although the sons of St Philip were not bound by a vow of obedience, some of them were not inferior in this respect to the Fathers of the desert themselves, and that no
 138 head of a religious Order, even of the ancient ones, as far as he knew, was ever better obeyed by his religious than was St Philip by his sons. The Saint was not contented with any kind of obedience, but he required it to be prompt, blind, interior, and exterior; and he used to say that *to be truly obedient, it did not suffice to do the thing commanded, but it must be done without reply*, that is, without seeking out reasons to the contrary. Thus, when Father Pompeo Pateri, who was told by him to go to Milan on business of importance, wished through humility to excuse himself as not being fit for it, St Philip, after urging him to fulfil his instructions in every particular, said to him at parting: *“Go, and trust in God; but take care not to examine the commands of Superiors, for everything will succeed and terminate happily.”* And so it proved, notwithstanding the many obstacles he met with on the part of persons in authority.

The Saint used to order his subjects to do extravagant things, entirely contrary to human prudence, in order to try if they were prompt in obeying without a word. He told one, who had been an officer, to carry a large dog in his arms through the streets of Rome; another had to carry food every day to a cat which he had left in his former home at San Girolamo della Carità. One was ordered by him to sing songs in presence of distinguished persons and even Cardinals; another to chant the Miserere at a wedding feast. Among others he tried particularly Father Pietro Consolini, who ever afterwards was his Benjamin.
 139 This father had to be examined for an ecclesiastical benefice obtained with a view to his ordination, and the examination was to take place in the presence of the Sovereign Pontiff Clement VIII. The holy Father commanded him, on presenting himself before the Pope, to say that he was a learned man, and that such persons had no need of examinations. What difficulty would any one not possessed of the virtue and obedience of Consolini have experienced in obeying a command

which exposed him to the obvious risk of some grave mortification! Nevertheless, without examining the order, or giving a thought to his own reputation, he executed the Father's command, using the very words enjoined by the Saint. In reward for his obedience, God so ordered it that, far from any harm happening to him, all went well with him. The Pope smiled at the proud reply, well knowing that it came from the school of Philip, and let him pass without examining him. The Saint also ordered Father Consolini to preach his first sermon in the church not only without any preparation, but without any idea that he was to preach that day. Although the hour for the sermon was very near, he obeyed without reply, and succeeded admirably. St Philip took with him one day to the monastery of Tore di Specchi, and ordered him forthwith to preach to the nuns; and to make it more difficult, he fixed upon the subject himself. This sermon also proved most successful, and gave great edification to the religious. The same thing happened to the Abbate Maffa, and it was remarked that everything which the Saint commanded, being guided by light from above, 140 always succeeded well; while, on the contrary, those who disobeyed him always failed disgracefully.

Father Tarugi, although he had always been most obedient to the Saint, was eagerly desirous of rising in the middle of the night for prayer, and asked his leave to do so. But the Saint, who knew the weakness of his constitution, refused. Tarugi would not be content with this, but insisted more and more. His request was always refused. At length, overcome by his ardent desire of prayer, which seemed to him the most efficacious means of growing in holiness, he determined to put his design in execution, and the first night that he rose to pray he injured his head so much that for eleven months after he could not pray at all. The Saint forbade one of his penitents to go to Tivoli; he went contrary to obedience, and falling from horseback, broke his thigh. He forbade another to go to Naples; he went nevertheless, but he nearly lost his life at sea, and would certainly have been drowned if the Saint had not miraculously appeared to him, seized him by the hair, and drawn him safe to land, warning him not to be disobedient another time. Fabrizio de' Massimi by not obeying Philip lost a large sum of money, and another who against his orders lent some money could never get it back. For other instances of this, see the Life of St Philip, written by Father Bacci, book i, chap. xx.

II.

- 141 It may perhaps be said, that as we cannot have St Philip for Superior or director, there is not so much to hope for from obedience, or to fear from disobedience. But I answer, that as obedience is the certain rule in all that is not sin, and the safe means of removing every doubt, therefore, if we follow the guidance of the man whom we have chosen for director, trusting that God will govern us by means of him who holds His place, obedience will always produce the same good effects, because it is identical with the will of God. Christ Himself has told us: "He that heareth you, heareth me."¹ And disobedience will always bring the same evil effects, because through it we act against the will of God. St Paul clearly says: "He that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."² Whether the Superior or director be a saint, as was St Philip, or a man of little or no virtue, obedience will always have the same merit, and will produce the same excellent effects. There may be even greater merit in obeying a Superior of little spirituality or talent, and without pleasantness of manner, than one of great perfection, because there would be more virtue in humbling ourselves to the first than to the second. He who obeys the one more readily than the other lays himself open to suspicion in the matter of obedience; just as the faith would be doubtful of one who should prostrate himself
- 142 before a crucifix of gold and not before one of wood, since the reason for honouring both the one and the other is exactly the same. So with regard to a Superior, be he more or less learned, more or less prudent or sympathetic, whatsoever he may be, he holds to us the place of God, and is always the accredited interpreter of the Divine will: "He is the angel of the Lord," and that is sufficient.

III.

Granted, then, that every kind of obedience which we pay to any Superior whatsoever is absolutely the will of God, who has decided that men should be guided by other men, as the Angel said to St Pachomius: "God wills that men should be directed by men;" therefore our holy Father wills that not only shall we obey the Superior, but also

¹ Luke x. 16.

² Rom. xiii. 2.

the other offices, such as the sacristan, the porter, the cook, in whatever concerns their offices; and he was wont to say that it was much better to obey their call than to remain in our own room to pray. Father Consolini gave a good reason for this, namely, that God, who placed the one in the office of Provost, also placed the others in these offices; so there is no less reason for submitting to the one than to the other in all that concerns their respective offices.

If sometimes a father excused himself from going at once when called by the sacristan to celebrate Mass, saying that people should have time given them to prepare themselves for so great an action, the Saint used to answer, that the true preparation of a priest was to live in such a way that at any hour, so far as his conscience was concerned, he could say Mass or communicate. He taught this doctrine by his own example, since he was most punctual when called to the door on business, or to the confessional, or to the sacristy to say Mass, leaving everything else; nor did he wait to be called a second time, but instantly, at any hour, and for every one, he would come down. He showed the same promptitude in every community action, saying that we must consider it certain that what is commanded us by those who hold the place of God is the best and most perfect thing we can do, although it may seem quite the reverse. Notwithstanding their other good qualities, he made very little account of those who replied to the orders of Superiors or other officers, or who discussed them; and he sharply reproved those who were wanting in punctuality in community duties, saying that things done by our own choice, although good, are not so meritorious as those done by obedience. As an instance of this, the Saint used to quote, with great praise, the example of a certain Father Zenobio de' Medici, of the Order of St Dominic, who was visited one day by Cosmo I., Grand Duke of Tuscany. In the midst of their conversation there came the summons to the refectory, and the good religious thought it better to obey the voice of God, signified to him by that bell, than to prolong his conversation with this great prince; therefore, making him a profound bow, without a word more he took leave of him to go whither a Prince more powerful than he was summoning him. The Saint used to add, that the pious prince, far from being offended by this apparently discourteous act, was much edified by it, and held the father in greater esteem and affection than before. Experience also teaches us that seculars are much edified when

they see our fathers break off all conversation and leave everything at once to obey the summons to community duties.

IV.

This refinement of prompt, spontaneous, and exact obedience has been preserved and is continually practised in our Congregation of the Oratory; so much so, that Cardinal Caracciolo, Archbishop of Naples, who was intimately acquainted with our communities, used to say that the Oratory was ruled and governed with a thread of silk.

And it is indeed thus; for by means of the exact obedience practised by the fathers and brothers in common, everything proceeds with gentleness and sweetness, and in perfect order. If this were wanting, all would at once fall into confusion and disorder; and for this reason no disobedience, however slight, can be tolerated in the Congregation. Father Consolini could not endure the obstinacy of a brother who multiplied his exercises of devotion to the prejudice of obedience, and having observed that although corrected by the Superior he did not put a stop to these inopportune, and therefore indiscreet devotions, he thought he ought by a public penance to mortify this brother, who trod underfoot, although under pretence of piety, the punctual obedience professed in the Congregation. This sentence of Consolini appeared too harsh to another father, who answered that this brother was very excusable, for if he was in error, *erat error pietatis* [it was an error of devotion], and, moreover, that he was known to be a holy man. To this remark Father Consolini gave a reply worthy of himself: "*That man who is not obedient will never be a saint.*" And so it is: he will never be holy who does not do the will of God, signified to him by obedience; while, on the other hand, he will be holy who is always and in everything obedient; because thus the will of God is always fulfilled, in which perfection consists.

Read the Lives of so many of our venerable fathers and brothers of different Congregations, written by Father Marciano and others, and you will find that, above their other virtues, they were distinguished for their voluntary and punctual obedience. Father Francesco Maria Tarugi, who by express command of the Pope was made Archbishop of Avignon, and afterwards Cardinal, was very remarkable in this respect. If in the one solitary instance related above he was disobedient,

to his own great cost, he was ever afterwards obedient to such a degree that he suspected every action of his, however good, which had not received the approval of St Philip. In a letter written to Naples to Father Francesco Bordini, who was also afterwards Archbishop of Avignon, he says: "I am most reluctant to undertake anything for which I have not the express approval of our Father Philip, who so long as he lives must be the rule for us all, to deviate from which would be tacitly to swerve from the will of God." The better to inspire others with this obedience, and especially Father Giovanni Matteo Ancina, he wrote thus to him: "I think you must remember that when the Jews went three times a year to the Temple, God guarded from the Gentiles their lands, which at those times were never injured; and when through obedience they let the land lie fallow the seventh year, it was so fertile the sixth, that it gave crops of grain and wine sufficient for three years." 146

Although, as I have said, in our Congregations no vow of obedience is made, for it is neither of obligation nor counsel to make it, it is not forbidden to any one of the fathers privately to make a vow to remain, a vow of obedience to the Superior *pro tempore*, or other similar ones; but they can never make solemn or public vows, as that would be an innovation upon the Institute, which absolutely prohibits any novelty. The ardent love which Father Tarugi had for this virtue impelled him to make one to the Saint, and he wrote thus from Naples to him: "Your Reverence holds in your hand the reins of my will bound by vow, and you can turn and lead me whichever way you will." And another time he wrote: "I know that God enlightens and guides your Reverence, and I trust more to your judgment than to any evidence founded either on the experience of life or on my own reason, or that of any one else whatever. Thus I have always been assured of the will of God, nor have I ever been misled, unless when I have wished to be overwise and transgress the line of your holy commands." He did not content himself with practising this perfect obedience to St Philip alone, but was equally submissive to all the other Superiors who were elected after the death of the Saint. And after he was Cardinal, and in his extreme old age had retired within the beloved walls of his Congregation, although he was not allowed to lay aside the Sacred Purple as he desired, still in all things and everywhere he guided himself by the direction of the Provost, even when it was at variance with his own 147

148 judgment. He carefully sought out the wishes of the Superior that he might fulfil them minutely, taking for his example the persevering obedience of the Redeemer; hence he would often say: "Christ humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death,"³ and He has given us an example. He desired that this most exemplary obedience should take root in all, and he particularly strove to train in this manner his beloved nephew, Father Tarugi, of the Congregation of Naples, to whom he wrote thus: "Be as the hand, which is always the same, whether shut or open; do not chance your spirit or mode of life in changing your residence or country. If you go to Rome, let yourself be as a stick in the hands of your Superiors; let them raise, lower, carry, or throw you away; have no opinion or will of your own; and avoid those who have not your spirit, or who have little or no devotion." To another father he wrote in these words: "Prefer obedience to everything, and for obedience leave prayer and all things else, because a truly obedient man cannot perish." He himself gave a great proof of his obedience when, after having introduced into Naples the exercises of the Oratory with much fruit and to the great edification of the whole city, in the midst of his works and with the prospect of doing still greater things, he was recalled by the holy Father to Rome. He immediately determined to go, although earnest representations were made to him by those in authority to induce him to wait at least until the Saint might be informed of the good which was being done by his means. Others would have considered this an excellent excuse for remaining; but he would not admit of it, fearing the danger of human attachment if he did not promptly and without repugnance leave any occupation whatsoever at the call of obedience. And in order to do most surely the will of God, manifested to him by his Superior, he left Naples and at once set out for Rome.

And the Venerable Father Giambattista Magnanti, of the Oratory of Aquila, a man of much virtue and of truly apostolic zeal, used to say that he set more value on obedience and the submission of our own will to others than upon the conversion of a whole world.

V.

149 Having brought forward so many examples and teaching of our an-

³Phil. ii. 8.

cient fathers, and so many motives to inspire us with a great desire to practise this beautiful and necessary virtue of obedience, without which we can never become saints, I must add that neither the length of time we have been in the Congregation, nor our advanced age or decrepitude, nor holding important offices, such as Deputy, nor having been once or oftener Superior, can exempt us from obedience. Not even the father who is actually Provost can be exempt, since he himself must obey the General Congregations, in which the decennial fathers take part, and also the smaller ones composed only of the Deputies; and when these by the majority of votes have determined anything (if it is not of those things which belong to the Superior alone), he is bound to obey and to put in force the decrees made by these Congregations, without being able to alter them, even supposing them to be contrary to his own judgment; because the community, canonically united in a Congregation, is above the Provost, in such a way that it has the power to depose him from his office and elect another in his place, if it should have just cause for so doing; as, for instance, if he should commit grave sins, or should wish to introduce novelties directly opposed to the rules, or destructive of the same; and there have been examples of this in some Congregations, although of most rare occurrence.

150

Now if all the fathers of the Congregation without exception, even the Superior himself, must submit to obedience, no less must the brothers, who are taken on purpose to serve the Congregation and all the fathers as occasion requires. They must be obedient in all things and everywhere, not only to the Superior, but also to the Father Minister, to whose care they are principally confided, and who holds conferences with them every fortnight, in addition to the General Congregation of faults. How could the house be carried on if the brothers did not obey the Father Minister, who is charged with the regulation of all its internal affairs, and with providing the necessary maintenance for all? Each one of them should perform with all possible exactness the office assigned to him, and should, moreover, obey the Provost and Father Minister in everything they may see fit to command, even if it should not belong to his office; because one brother may be absent or necessarily employed elsewhere, and then it is right that another should supply his place. And the sacristan brother must also obey the Prefect of the sacristy, that proper order may be observed.

151 If, however, a brother feels himself overworked by the Father Minister, he may speak to the Superior, who will apply a suitable remedy; but I do not think there will be much need of this, because there is great discretion in the Congregation. Sometimes one brother will complain that he is more burthened than another, especially if he has to fulfil this one's office in addition to his own, and will accuse those over him of partiality. He does not reflect that everything has to be done amongst them without so many considerations; nor does he remember that the other may be occupied by the Superior or Minister in some things more needed at that time, and more useful for the Congregation; and that neither the Superior nor the Minister are bound to give him reasons for their orders, especially when such things ought to be kept secret. These complaints often proceed from a little pride and self-esteem or self-love, or from a sort of jealousy of others, which makes him fancy they are favoured by the Superiors; or from slothfulness, thinking he does a great deal, and more than he is bound to do, which is not the case; or judging that the other brothers might do more than they do to help or spare him. And yet, if they do not do as much as he does, it is perhaps for want of health, or because they are not as strong as he is. Let the brothers be well on their guard lest the devil should deceive them in this respect. He who has a true wish to obey, without any other end but that of pleasing God, obeys without thinking so much about it or discussing it in his mind.

152 And even if they were always to remain burthened with labours for the Congregation, and thus shorten their lives, what harm would there be? On the contrary, what a glorious crown might they not expect if they gave their lives for holy obedience! This is not likely, on account of the discretion which is always used, but it might happen through inadvertence. If the priests are to be ready, when need be, to lose their health and life in working for the salvation of their neighbour (and, by the grace of God, this does happen to many, who consider themselves most fortunate), why should not the brothers also be ready to do as much, labouring for the good of the Congregation, and for those who work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls?

The brothers have also to practice another sort of obedience. Not only must they obey the Father Superior and the Father Minister, but all the fathers without distinction. I do not say that they have to obey them by doing the business of the house as they like, because that does

not concern them, but only the Superior. I do not say they must serve them as hired servants do their masters in this world, but that they must render them those little services of which they may stand in need. The fathers do not use any words of command towards the brothers, but only of request, with all civility and gentleness; and rightly. But you, my dear brothers, should not throw in their face a blunt and discourteous "I will not," or "I cannot," when you really could help them without prejudice to what is due to the community. For everyone knows that the common good should always be preferred to private wants, and no one is so indiscreet as to expect to be served to the injury of the community, or in preference to it. One of the fathers, for instance, may require you to go and fetch the tailor, to take a letter or a message, to make some little purchase for him, to bring him some water to his room, or similar things; and why should you refuse him, 153 although it be a little inconvenient? Why will you always excuse yourself on account of the office you hold in the service of the community, when you could easily attend to both? If there were no other obligation, there is always that of charity which should move you. How can you show yourself so reluctant to serve this priest, who asks some favour of you? Do you not recognize, as you should do, Jesus Christ in his person, and do you not consider him your superior, which he really is? And if a father who has asked some little service of you sees that you refuse it to him, but that you always readily and gladly serve another, what must he think of your partiality? Here again you must be careful not to deceive yourselves, nor to lose the great merit you might gain by this kind of obedience. Your office and vocation is to serve all the priests of the house, who are the ministers of God, in everything that you can, and as you yourselves would like to be served in your needs; in the same way that the office and vocation of the priests is to serve all by preaching, hearing confessions, visiting the sick, giving advice, consoling the afflicted, &c. If they, being overwhelmed by their various occupations, cannot perform themselves the little services they require, who will do them if you do not? Realize what you are, and remember that you can also become saints as well as, and even better than, the priests, if you know how, but that you will never be saints if you are not truly obedient, and if you choose to work only according 154 to your own method and caprice.

With regard to the novices, they must not only obey the Superior, as do the fathers and brothers, but especially the Prefect or Master to whom they are consigned by the Congregation, that he may train them in the spiritual life, teach them to observe the rules and usages of the Institute, and help them to advance in virtue and perfection; and who must watch over them with the greatest care and vigilance, in order that they may become fitted for the Institute, and must try them in various ways, to find out if they are worthy of being admitted as subjects of the Congregation. They must, therefore, use every endeavour to be exact in obedience, to be prompt and ready to obey even in things most humbling and difficult, for such the Institute of St Philip expects them to be, desiring that they should be particularly and skilfully exercised in this virtue: "Let trial be made if they be prompt in obeying in all things, even the most humiliating and most severe" (Inst., cap. 6). Formerly, when they lived in the world, they were not much accustomed to overcome their own will, which is the strongest obstacle to perfection; but, thanks to the practice of obedience, it is subdued for them by degrees; for the Congregation insists on having tractable and not stubborn minds; and if they do not begin in the three years of their noviciate to acquire the good habit of renouncing their own will, they will never do so later.

- 155 The novices may, perhaps, be tempted to be very obedient during these three years, with the view of securing their reception into the community at the end of their noviciate, so as not to be liable to expulsion except for grave faults, because they imagine that after these three years of probation they will have more liberty to please themselves, and will not be obliged to live so strictly. But how they deceive themselves! It would indeed be hypocrisy, and a fraud upon the Congregation, besides serious injury to himself, if a novice were to wish to pass for being obedient without really being so; because the truly obedient man must not only execute externally the work commanded, but must accompany it with the interior assent of the will and the conviction of the intellect that the command given to him is good, and that it is the will of God signified to him by the mouth of his Novice-master, and as such must be executed. If the obedience is not performed with these right intentions, it will not be accompanied by charity, which gives the action its value; and God will not be pleased with it, nor will He ever give us grace to acquire the habit of obedi-

ence, without which it is impossible to live well in our Congregation. The novices must learn that in our Congregation all must persevere in the practice of obedience even until death, and that the oldest fathers in the community sometimes encounter harder obediences than any they ever had in their noviciate. During that time a man is ever on the watch expecting some order, for some will be given him every day, and even several times a day; but a father who has lived many years in the Congregation, and does not receive them so frequently, is sometimes taken by surprise when orders come from the Superior or other officers on whom we are bound to depend, or from the rule itself. These being harder and more repugnant to nature for being unexpected, it requires all our virtue and spirituality to submit to them; and we shall then find it of great service to have acquired the habit of obedience and a good store of virtue during the noviciate. I will say no more regarding the novices, because every father who may be appointed to take charge of them will be able to tell them what is necessary better than I can, and I pass on to examine how we ought all to exercise that obedience which is a special prerogative of our Congregation in the form in which we practise it. 156

VI.

The obedience which we must especially practice with all possible diligence and exactness extends to all the rules, constitutions, customs, and observances left us by our holy Father and Patriarch, St Philip Neri, who caused them to be practised for thirty successive years before having them approved by the Holy Apostolic See, and before writing them down and making them known. I will explain them all briefly, at least the principal ones, not indeed for our fathers, novices, and brothers, who read them at the fountain-head, in the printed book of the rules, but for those who desire to be numbered among us and are called by God to the Congregation, so that they may not be able to say, after having entered it, that they did not know how much the Institute required of them. In the first place, I will explain the rules given to the novices, and afterwards those which are to be observed in common by the other fathers and brothers. 157

Those who enter the Congregation, be they priests, clerics, or laymen, of whatever age or condition, dwell in the house for the space of one month before receiving the habit, to see if our mode of life

pleases them, and also that the fathers may be able to judge whether they are truly fitted for our exercises. Their first acceptance and permission to enter the house lies with the General Congregation of all the fathers who have completed ten years in the Congregation, and are hence called decennial fathers. The month being over, if they are admitted to the probation of the first year by the Provost and Deputies, they are forthwith intrusted to the care of the father called the Prefect of novices, who should be one of the most mature and observant of the community. This father, in addition to the great care he must take to make them advance in virtue, must also make them observe the following things:—1. They must serve holy Mass every day, even if they should be priests themselves. 2. They must abstain from every kind of study of humanities, at the discretion of the Superior, in order that they may first learn humility. 3. They must be prompt in
158 going to the refectory as soon as the signal is given, and there either wait at table or read, as they may be directed. 4. Every day or every week one of them must wait or read in the refectory, both at the first and second table, at dinner and supper; although those who are priests do not usually wait at dinner, except at the first table. 5. They must likewise read in church, each one in his own day or week, immediately before the sermon, which they must all be present to hear; and this custom of reading or waiting must continue until they have completed their decennialate, or thereabouts, at the will of the Superior and Deputies. 6. After dinner they are permitted to take a walk, lest their health should suffer from too assiduous application. 7. In the evening, at the appointed hour, they must go to the Little Oratory to make the prayer in common. 8. After dinner and supper they shall spend half-an-hour at recreation in common with the other fathers, where, all severity being laid aside, they must behave cheerfully, and with such modesty as not to touch any one, even in joke. 9. The moment they are called by the porter to any one, they must go immediately to the parlours, taking care to dismiss the person with few words, and not admitting any one into the house or into their own rooms without the knowledge of the Superior. 10. They must not go out of the house alone, nor without leave. 11. They must not occupy themselves with the affairs of externs, nor in those things which are forbidden by any decree or custom of the Congregation, without the
159 leave of the Father Provost. 12. On feast days, they must remain in

the sacristy to help the priests, and serve in giving Holy Communion, nor are they to leave it without special necessity. 13. Each one must keep neatly and adorn the altar confided to his care. 14. They shall go to confession three times a week; and those who are not priests shall communicate at the discretion of their confessor. They usually do so three times a week. 15. If they commit some fault, let them submit themselves spontaneously to correction. 16. Every fortnight they must go to the Congregation called of faults, which is common to all; and in the week in which this does not occur, they must hold a conference with their Prefect on spiritual matters, when they may accuse themselves of their defects and receive from him some opportune advice. It is customary at such times to read some good book, the better to learn Divine things by communicating them to one another; and the brothers hold a like conference with the Father Minister. These are the particular rules regarding the novices; and we may remark that after the three years of their noviciate they no longer ask leave of the Father Prefect before going out, but of the Father Provost, and they may go out without a companion; but the brothers must ask this leave of the Father Minister all their lifetime.

VII.

Proceeding to the constitutions and rules common to all, I will mention here the principal ones, although I shall not preserve the order in which they are placed, as it does not seem necessary; but in every case I will quote the chapter, in order that, if desired, they may be studied at their source. The first and principal decree is the following (Inst., cap. 4):—"As our Congregation is bound together by no bond save that of charity, according to the wish of the holy Founder, if any of our fathers should wish to bind the other fathers and lay-brothers by any oath, promise, or vow, even though they should form the majority, they will of course be at liberty to enter whatever religious Order they please, but the others, however inferior in number, shall keep all the property of the Congregation while they persevere in their former state, without making any change in it; and they shall have no obligation to give the others anything whatsoever. In this way the Institute shall be preserved in the Church of God surrounded with variety." 160

It is also laid down that the Congregation shall not take any other place or house to govern; the holy Father desiring that every house

of our Congregations, according to the custom of the Roman one, should rule and govern itself separately. The decennial fathers alone elect (cap. 5) every three years for Superior a father of the same house, who must be at least forty years old, who has been fifteen years in the
 161 Congregation, and who has exercised the office of Deputy or Minister. The election takes place with secret voting, and in a truly admirable manner, which I do not describe here for fear of being too diffuse, and because it would be difficult to understand it without seeing it practised. Once elected, he receives the title of Provost; in the house, however, he is only given the title of Father, a name of love, nor is he ever called by his Christian or family name. And the three years being completed, he may be confirmed in his post at the discretion of the Congregation. The other officers (except the confessor of the house and the four Deputies, who are elected with secret votes) are appointed by the Father Provost and the Deputies.

On the Provost devolves the government of the house and the administration of all the property. He has also to provide the necessary food for all, as also the clothes for those who require them, such as the lay-brothers. To him it also belongs to convoke, at least every week, the Congregation of the four Deputies, without whose consent he can do nothing which regards the general government of the house; as well as to convoke the Congregation of the decennials, and to propose the things which have to be done or decided, or which may require remedy. He has also the power of giving every month, if he chooses, a piece of gold in alms to the poor. If there be occasion to spend larger sums, he must seek the consent of the Deputies; and if the sum exceed
 162 ten pounds sterling, then the permission of the whole Congregation is necessary; and the same holds good of any work for which extraordinary expenses are needed.

From this we learn the obedience which the Superior himself must exercise towards the Congregation of which he is the head; and certainly no little virtue is required in one of his position to submit sometimes to his inferiors, and very often to see his proposals, which appear to him good and prudent, rejected, and resolutions and decrees passed against his own judgment (although this is done with all the respect due to him); and what is more, he must himself ensure their being punctually observed. Here we may recognize the holy dexterity of our great Saint, who well understood how to engraft upon everything the

spirit of humility and interior mortification, so that his sons, in all the rules and offices of the Congregation, even in that of Superior, should find no satisfaction for self-love, but, on the contrary, wherewithal to mortify it on every occasion; and that everything should be to them the means of acquiring merit and advancing in perfection. Considering this, every sensible man will see that the priests of the Oratory are not likely to covet the offices of the Congregation, least of all that of Superior, unless they seek them with the sole object of being continually exercised in obedience, humiliations, and mortifications—never light, and sometimes very severe; as in the primitive Church men holly and laudably desired the episcopate, because to be a Bishop was one and the same thing as to become a martyr.

But let us proceed with the rules. The Father Provost goes to the refectory with the others, and he has no distinction in the church or the refectory, in his room or in the house, except having the first place, and a brother being appointed for his service. He alone, having the chief power in the Congregation, can call for an account of everything done by the other officers, and of all the orders he has given them, and of their execution; and no one else may interfere in this. He also requires an account of all expenditure made for the house in each year; he causes two fathers to be chosen, one a Deputy and the other not, to audit it exactly, and afterwards he has it read in the first Congregation of faults in the month of January, in the presence of all the fathers. He must also take particular charge of those who have not yet completed their decennialate, to help their progress in virtue. The Father Provost (cap. 8) is exempt from no rule, and, like all the other fathers, old and young, whether priests or not, goes to confession three times a week to the confessor of the house, unless he receives permission from him sometimes to do otherwise for some valid reason. 163

Every fortnight there is the General Congregation called “of faults,” at which all are present. One of the fathers who have completed ten years of priesthood in the Congregation, according to rotation, makes a short discourse to excite the hearts of all to the service of God and the perfect observance of the rules, and all the priests, novices, clerics, and lay-brothers, one after the other kneeling in the midst, accuse themselves humbly of the faults they have committed 164 against our manner of life; and particularly, if they have offended any one, they ask his pardon. The lay-brothers and clerics accuse them-

selves of their faults before the others, beginning with the last, and then they go out; then the novices who may be priests, and they also depart; and the others remain till all have accused themselves. In these accusations of faults no mention is made of anything which belongs to sacramental confession. Each one having finished his accusation of himself, the father who has given the chapter administers in a spirit of sweetness that correction which he deems suitable, even to the Provost himself, or suggests some good advice, but all in few words and respectfully. The same evening, after supper, some papers are carried round in a bag, on which are written various light penances, and they are distributed, each drawing one in turn and reading it aloud, beginning with the Superior. These penances must be performed within the space of fourteen days, that is, before the next Congregation.

Among the various officers, that of secret corrector is given to one of the oldest fathers, who has the power of privately correcting all, even the Deputies and the Provost himself, for those faults of which he knows them to be guilty. This correction, however, must not be made for every slight thing, but only for faults of some weight or importance, and with all possible charity and gentleness, so that he may seem to be correcting himself rather than others.

165 All priests of the Oratory must live in the Congregation at their own expense, paying their pension according to the means of each, the Provost and Deputies having the power to remit the whole or part of it when it appears fitting to them. This pension is never compulsory, but is given voluntarily; nor is any bargain made with postulants, but the offering is accepted which they make before they enter the Congregation. In poor Congregations every one will understand that things must be of course on a different footing.

All attention to temporal business is entirely forbidden to our fathers, unless the Provost and Deputies allow it for some just cause. No one of us, however much pressed to do so, may teach in any other Congregation or Society out of the house, or assume any other duty without the consent of the Congregation; nor may he employ himself in the service of nuns as their ordinary confessor, or in reforming their way of life, or managing their affairs and their revenues; and the same applies to the management of the affairs of seminaries, colleges, societies, or universities.

No father shall ever seek or accept ecclesiastical benefices. He may only retain that which he held previous to entering the Congregation, if it does not require personal residence. Much less may any one accept any dignity without the express command of the Sovereign Pontiff. It is forbidden us to frequent courts or to ask for offices or benefices for others, any more than for ourselves, without the consent of the Provost and Deputies. No one may have a servant of his own, but under the pressure of necessity he may speak to the Provost on the subject, who, together with the Deputies, will make suitable provision for him. Boys shall not enter the rooms unless accompanied by persons who will remain with them during their visit. Other persons may be admitted, but sparingly. No one can be allowed to receive ecclesiastical orders, nor to preach, nor to hear confessions, without the assent of those priests who have completed their decennium in the Congregation. None of our fathers are allowed to print any book without leave from the Provost and Deputies. No rule may be proposed to the Sovereign Pontiff for confirmation unless first agreed to by all the decennial priests. 166

When some law of general importance has to be made, all the priests who have completed their triennium in the Congregation assist, with only a consultive vote, the decennials alone having the decisive vote. When anything concerning the Congregation has to be treated of, there must be a free and public consultation of the fathers upon it; and when some days have passed, the secret voting shall take place, unless necessity or utility, or the smallness of the matter itself, require it to be completed in the same Congregation, always with the understanding that the triennials have only a consultive vote and the decennials the decisive vote.

The dress of our fathers (cap. 9) shall be what is fitting for secular priests: they shall wear nothing made of silk except the zucchetto and the lining of the beretta. The lay-brothers shall wear the habit down to the knee and the cloak a little longer. Those who are clothed at the expense of the house have recourse to the Father Minister in all their necessities, and he provides for them in all charity. In dressing, walking, talking, in every action and gesture, they must observe modesty and decorum. Let them honour and esteem one another without using too familiar terms, and let all their actions be in accordance with the community life of simple and right-minded men, without any trace 167

of singularity.

At the end of the recreation after dinner and supper, let each one retire immediately to his own room. This rule is of great consequence, because it prevents much useless talking and dissipation; for a man will be less dissipated by an entire hour of recreation in common made through obedience than by a short conversation held without necessity and against the rule. With regard to the vacant rooms, the seniors of the Congregation will have the right of choice, unless the Provost and Deputies should wish it otherwise.

None of those who have not yet completed their decennium in the Congregation shall go out of the house without the leave of the Father Provost, or, in his absence, of the senior father in the Congregation, or, if he also is absent, of the next in seniority, and so on. No one who is invited to dinner or supper outside the house can accept the invitation without the permission of the Father Provost; and it is not the custom to give this permission, when the invitation is in the same town, unless it be with his nearest relations or some personage of note; and even then it is very seldom done. Nor can any of the fathers invite a stranger, even though he be his friend or relation, to dinner or supper, nor ask him to pass the night in the house, nor take him to stay in our country-house, without the permission of the Provost. The Provost cannot give leave to any subject to go to his native place or elsewhere for more than one month, even on important business, without the consent of the Deputies. No one may be godfather at baptisms or other sacraments. Each one will take his turn for reciting the Litanies and other prayers in the Little Oratory, or for singing the Passion when the discipline is taken. Besides the novices, both clerics and lay-brothers, who serve Mass every day, many fathers have the laudable custom of doing so when they are able. In the evening, in addition to the brothers who by turns wait at table, the other fathers also, even the oldest and the Superior himself, wait each in turn.

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Besides the infirmarians who are appointed for the service of the sick, all endeavour to help, serve, and console them as far as possible; and when they are near to death, at the sound of the bell all assemble, priests and lay-brothers, to implore the mercy of God for the dying man. And when they are dead, every priest celebrates three Masses and the brothers recite nine rosaries for them over and above the high Mass which is sung in church for the repose of their souls.

As soon as the signal is given for going to the refectory (cap. 10), both at noon and in the evening, every one hastens thither immediately, that they may not keep the others waiting; and all keep silence 169 until they have entered the room where the recreation in common is held. On going into the refectory every one bows to the crucifix placed opposite the door, and reverently saluting the others, with modesty and silence takes his place according to the order of seniority, and without casting inquisitive glances on the food which is placed on the table or which is being brought in. The Provost, or in his absence the Dean, or the senior father of the Congregation, after waiting a little to allow all time to come from their rooms, says the grace prescribed by Holy Church. Whoever comes to table later (but not, however, after the Latin reading is finished) shall stand near the door, pray in silence for a little while, and, bowing to the Provost, take his seat, not in his own place, but below all, for fear of disturbing the others. If the Latin reading be finished, he cannot enter the refectory at all, but must wait for the second table. An exception is, however, made for confessors, who, on feast-days, are allowed to enter even if the reading in the vernacular be finished. All have the same food, the same portion, the same bread and wine, without partiality or distinction of any kind, even for the Provost, so that the last of the brothers receives the same as the Superior and the other priests. And all must content themselves with the food provided, and must either ask for nor bring in for themselves any other without the leave of the Provost or the Minister, who will be ready to supply each one's necessities as they see fit. Should any of those things generally given to all be wanting, it 170 may be asked for by some sign, but this should be rather the care of the next father, if he perceive it. Strict silence is always observed at table, even by the Superior, and speaking is only permitted to the father who proposes and to those who answer the cases of conscience, in the following manner:—

At dinner as well as supper one of the fathers, whose name is given out by the reader, proposes two doubts or questions as soon as the Provost has given the signal for the termination of the reading, which generally lasts for two-thirds of the meal. These doubts must be chosen from Holy Scripture, moral theology, or liturgical discipline, care being taken not to propose things too obscure or subtle, or beyond the power of all to answer. Each one answers in turn, with modest brevity

and without ostentation, like a disciple questioned by his master, and the same manner is observed by the father who has prepared the solution of the doubts to remove every difficulty by the authorities he adduces. If any one, instead of answering, leaves it to the judgment of others, this must be ascribed to modesty rather than to ignorance.

At table (cap. 10), in the first place, the sacred Scriptures are read, then some holy writer in Latin, and finally some book in the vernacular, the Life of a Saint, or some book of salutary instruction, at the discretion of the Superior. On certain occasions the reader, after the usual
171 reading, gives out the names of benefactors, and announces whatever he has been instructed, either in writing or by word of mouth, to make known, without adding anything of his own. One of the fathers is intrusted with the office of correcting the faults sometimes made in reading; he does this gently and with a single word, and the reader must repeat the words with the same pronunciation that was used by the corrector. No letters from any one are to be read at table, nor is the porter or any one else to bring in letters or messages; but if any urgent necessity arise, it is first mentioned to the Provost, or to whoever is holding his place.

Every evening (cap. 5), supper being ended, before the fathers rise from table, a father, called the Monitor of the prayers, in an audible voice requests all to recommend to God the needs of Holy Church, of the Congregation, of our benefactors, and other particular necessities according to circumstances. Last of all, the ordinary grace is said, and the fathers pass out of the refectory, two and two, keeping silence until they reach the recreation room.

VIII.

These are the principal and nearly all the rules left us by our holy Father, St Philip Neri, and we must keep them faithfully if we wish to be his true sons. This is the principal obedience which God requires of us, in calling us through His exceeding goodness to this holy Institute. By this means He designed to save us, and moreover, to make us saints.
172 *Hæc est via, ambulemus in ea* [this is the way, let us walk along it]. Let us walk along this way with great joy and fervour, because for us it is the road of perfect safety. What difficulty can we find in keeping these rules, which are by no means severe, but, on the contrary, easy

and sweet, and which are capable of carrying us swiftly to great perfection, if we are exact in their observance? It would be useless to enter the Congregation and to put on St Philip's habit if we do not intend to observe them, just as it would be useless to learn a trade if we did not intend to practise it, or to embrace the military profession without being prepared to fight. May God preserve us from ever transgressing them, and still more from despising them, or inciting others to do so, either by word or example! The holy Father would soon turn his back on us, and instead of being our zealous protector before God, would become our severe accuser.

What valid excuse could we ever adduce for not observing our rules? Perhaps because they do not bind under sin, either mortal or venial? Neither do those of the Order of St Dominic, of the Society of Jesus, and many other religious Orders oblige under sin; and yet, if they were not observed, how would those Orders fare? Our holy Founder, like many others, has not wished to bind us under sin, in order that we might serve God through love rather than by compulsion. If, then, you love God, you ought to observe them with the utmost care, to give Him a proof of your love: "If you love me, keep my commandments." What would you think of a son who would never obey 173 his father unless he ordered him about with a drawn sword and under pain of death? I will not dilate upon this point, because there are many books which treat of it forcibly, especially the admirable work of Father Alphonso Rodriguez, of the Society of Jesus, on Christian perfection. Read his treatise on the observance of rules, and it will be of good service to you; and do not fail to read what is said on this subject in the "Spiritual Conferences" of St Francis of Sales, who gave to his daughters of the Visitation constitutions and rules so similar to ours that they seem to have been dictated by the same spirit. He raises precisely this question, whether we sin in not keeping rules which by their nature and according to the intention of him who framed them do not oblige under sin; and he replies, that to consider any constitution useless is to despise the rule, which in itself is extreme presumption and temerity; and if any one does not indeed consider it useless, but nevertheless will not submit to it, he frustrates the design of the legislator, with grave injury to his neighbour, whom he scandalizes; he is disloyal to the community in which he lives, and breaks the promise he made to the Congregation of which he is a member. For it is clear that on

entering it he made, if not an express, at any rate a tacit promise to observe the rules and to fulfil all that the others do, otherwise he would not have been accepted; and who can venture to assert that there is no sin in this? All doctors of moral theology agree that when the rule is not observed through contempt, there is always sin, by reason of the contempt, if not by reason of the rule. The same Saint gives us four signs whereby we may ascertain when there is contempt:—1. If when we are corrected we treat it lightly and feel no sorrow. 2. If we persevere in our inobservance and show no desire of amendment. 3. If we argue that the rule is unsuitable. 4. If we endeavour to draw others into the same inobservance, and to remove their fears of it by saying it is nothing, and that there is no harm in it. This is also confirmed by St Thomas, who says: “A man sins by contempt when his will refuses to be subject to the ordinances of the law or rule, and from this he proceeds to act contrary to the law or rule.” St Francis of Sales goes on to say: “People are often tempted to think they are not disobedient when they despise only one or two rules, which appear to them of little importance; but this is a delusion, because what one values little another will prize very highly; one person will neglect one rule, a second will despise another, and thus everything will soon fall into confusion.

When we transgress some rule seldom, through frailty or some slight negligence, we need not distress ourselves, because the holy Father, who wishes us to walk by love, will not require so much strictness from us. Let us study to amend, and be content. When the rule is transgressed through a certain repugnance to obedience or through notable indolence, every soul that has not a careless conscience will confess it as a venial sin; but he who violates it through contempt, or because he is too proud to subject himself to some rule, or some order given by the Superior, ought he not to confess it as a greater evil still? It is true that, strictly speaking, it is no sin to break a rule which does not bind under sin, but we may sin by carelessness in not keeping it, and still more by neglecting those means which God has given us for the attainment of perfection. Besides, if I deliberately break a rule, I show that I make no account of an ordinance inspired by God to our holy Founder. It is not owing to me that regular observance does not become entirely extinct. That can be no small affair upon which the good of the whole community depends; nor can the knowledge that

there are others among us who do not observe all the rules, or who neglect many of them, excuse our disobedience. There were faults even in the Apostolic College governed by Jesus Christ Himself; what wonder if we find some in our houses? St Philip, foreseeing that there would sometimes be inobservant subjects, has left us remedies for their correction; such as the loving admonitions of the secret corrector, the public accusations of our inobservances and imperfections in the Congregation of faults, and the advice and the public and secret penances which the Superior ought to give to transgressors; and if you conceal your inobservances lest these remedies should be applied to you for your correction, so much the worse for you. In the meantime, the fact of there being members of the community as bad as yourself does not in the least defend or exculpate you, any more than that thief is excused who pleads that there are many other thieves in the world. You will see some day that there could be no sufficient reason for your not having kept the rules, except actual inability, or an exemption granted you by your Superior for some just motive, or charity, which is a law above every law. Therefore, that you may not have to repent, perhaps too late and without fruit, take care to practise this obedience to the holy Father by keeping the easy and gentle rules he has left you; and above all, I entreat you to obey them with love and without anxiety; for thus they will be less burdensome to you. I will say to you what Solomon said: "Take hold on instruction, leave it not; keep it, because it is thy life."⁴ Hold your rule in great esteem as a treasure with which to purchase heaven. Neglect it not on any account; keep it at all cost; for it will be your life of grace and the means of acquiring for you in reward the true life of glory. 176

IX.

Our obedience to our holy rules must be universal, observing all, and not contenting ourselves with only observing some. I have not noted them all here, partly to avoid repetition, for you will find them scattered through the other chapters, and partly because they cannot well be understood without being seen in practice. But I have purposely omitted one of the principal ones, in order to give it a paragraph to itself, because obedience to this rule is of the utmost importance to the 177

⁴Prov. iv. 13.

well-being of the Congregation and to the peace of its subjects. It is as follows:— “Let no one refuse any office which may be assigned to him by the Congregation, or by the Father Provost and Deputies; but let him receive it with all submission of mind. If any one considers that he has some grounds for refusing, he may explain his reasons for doing so, once or twice, with due modesty; but if the Provost and Deputies do not approve of them, he must accept it without further excuse” (cap. 5). This is the clear text of the Institute, and we must obey it, unless we have even more than a just reason to prevent us. But what reason can we ever have for refusing the offices which the Congregation thinks well to impose upon us? It could not exist if all did not serve it, either in one office or another. Three reasons, or rather excuses, are usually put forward. The first is that the office is a servile one and beneath our dignity; the second is that we have not sufficient ability for such an office; the third, that it takes us from prayer and from attending to our own progress. I will reply to all three very briefly, and I hope, with the help of God, to satisfy and convince you.

178 To the first reason, then, which is brought forward, namely, *the lowliness of the office*, I reply: The Archangel St Raphael for a long time acted as servant to Tobias without considering himself dishonoured thereby. In the house of God there is no office of little account. It is always a great glory to be able to serve our God, even if it be in the humblest offices of the Congregation. How have we ever merited that God should deign to make use of us and occupy us in His service, even if it were only in the character of a muleteer? This is such a noble thing in itself that there is no office, however lowly in the eyes of the world, which would not be a great honour for us. Whoever makes use of any one lays himself under an obligation to him. What honour can there be so completely satisfying to our souls as to hear that God wills to make use of us and to put Himself under obligation to us? Moreover, what honour and grandeur would there be, for instance, in preaching, or in being Superior, Deputy, Minister, Novice-master, Prefect of the Oratory, or of preachers, if God does not will it? What indignity is there in superintending, let us say, the poultry-yard, or in cooking, or acting as porter, if God wills it? Or what humiliation in going to work in the garden if it pleases God? Therefore, as everything in the house of God is most honourable, we must, as our Venerable Father Mariano Sozzini used to say, be indifferent to all offices and detached

from all; only, he added, "a little more leaning towards the humblest offices seems to me laudable, but otherwise we must be indifferent."

To the second reason brought forward I would answer: That every one does right in believing himself unfit, but it is not for him to judge of himself. Let him modestly represent his unfitness; but if notwithstanding his remonstrations, the Congregation decides on giving him that office, he must be satisfied and not lose courage. Father Balthazar Alvarez, of the Society of Jesus, used to say to his subjects: "Remember what the Angel said to St Joseph when on the part of God he commanded him to go into Egypt, 'Be there until I shall tell thee.'"⁵ David says: "Commit thy way to the Lord; hope in Him and He will succour thee."⁶ Because if the Congregation wills it, it is God that wills it and inspires it. If God wills it and puts any one in such an office in spite of his unworthiness, he will succeed in it, not merely without loss, but perfectly; and if it should be above his strength, God will supply what is wanting; and if He commands one to speak who cannot, He engages to dictate to him the words to use. Moses wished to refuse the office which God laid upon him of leader of His people, and the Lord said to him: "Who made man's mouth? or who made the dumb and the deaf, the seeing and the blind? Did not I?"⁷ Moses then submitted, trusting in God, and (because out of obedience he undertook what God commanded) he acquired thereby the greatest wisdom and holiness, and the most intimate familiarity with God. What knowledge had he of governing? what experience had he? what eloquence, when he stammered? Notwithstanding all this incapacity, he succeeded admirably, because it was God who placed him in that position. Ah! how often is it not unfitness which withholds us, but sloth, or fear of the trouble the office may entail! But he who trusts in God fears nothing. If we do our best, if we pray to obtain from God the help we need, all will then succeed, because it is under obedience. 179 180

As to the third reason, namely, that we fear the office may take us from prayer and from attending to our progress in holiness, I reply: 1. That the man who has a true hunger for prayer will never neglect it without absolute necessity, however much he may have to do, and he will know how to find time for it, in the same way that the Saints

⁵ Matt. ii. 13.

⁶ Ps. xxxvi. 5.

⁷ Exod. iv. 11.

181 did, who were more occupied than we are; and whoever really has this great desire, as each of us ought to have, will despatch more business in one hour than any one else in ten. 2. That if he should sometimes be inevitably prevented from making his prayer in order to fulfil his office perfectly, the most sure maxim is to serve God as He then wills to be served, and not to seek anything further. Father Balthazar Alvarez, whom we have quoted above, had many occupations and offices which kept him from prayer, to which he was ardently attached; and one day he thus lovingly complained to God: "Is it possible that I can please Thee thus, and that my soul can thrive without its food?" He received this answer from God: "Be satisfied that I make use of thee, although it seems to thee that thou art not with me." There is no doubt that a King would be more pleased with a courtier who fought for him and who guarded and defended a fortress, than with one who remained idly in his palace enjoying his society. God makes use of us by giving us this office to perform for the service of the Congregation, which is His house. His holy will is that we obey blindly by accepting the offices given to us. Some have become saints without prayer, but never any one without obedience. Thus, then, are all the excuses disposed of. Let us, therefore, hold our peace.

If this does not suffice, let us consider the evils which arise from refusing offices. In the first place, the Congregation is grieved, because it is forced to lay more burdens on the others, and sometimes to impose several offices on one subject, and it is not reasonable that some should wear themselves out, while others do little, or nothing at all. 2. When one father has refused an office, it is always more difficult to find another to accept it; for thee seems to be, as it were, more excuse for trying to avoid it. 3. We are almost obliged to desire some other office, because we know that the Congregation cannot leave us without one, especially when it has few subjects; for amongst those few everything has to be done. If it be true what is written of Judas, the betrayer of Christ, that when our Saviour proposed to His Apostles to constitute one of them treasurer, to receive and expend the small alms offered for their support, so that the others might attend to preaching without interruption, Judas desired, and by repeated entreaties obtained, this office; this should indeed be a lesson to us, and a great reason for fearing to desire or procure offices of our own choice, because this office was to Judas the principal cause of his utter ruin.

He had already a great hankering after money, and by frequent dealing with it his appetite for it increased, and brought him to his miserable end. I own I think a thunderbolt which deprived us of life would be preferable to one single desire of any particular office. The Congregation would indulge you by giving it to you, to avoid vexing you and hearing your complaints; but if it does, it does so unwillingly. And, moreover, that office which is given to you to satisfy you may bring upon you some great evil, and expose you to some danger for which you are little prepared. Whereas if you had humbly received the office which the Congregation meant to bestow upon you, judging it the best and most fitted for you, it would, because it was the will of God and not your own will, have brought you some great benefit which now you will never know. 4. Lastly, you give more or less scandal to others by refusing an office assigned to you by obedience; and others may readily follow this example, saying: "Oh, Father such an one has no scruple in disregarding obedience in this respect; there cannot be so much harm in it." And the impression made would be still more hurtful if this refusal came not from young but from old fathers. Oh, what a multitude of evils!

X.

Although we are not bound by a vow of obedience like religious, we shall have nevertheless to render strict account to God for this refusal of offices, which may inflict so much injury upon the Congregation, as well as for every other disobedience. Our holy Father, who detested disobedience above all things, and considered it destructive of his Institute, was not contented with ordering that the disobedient should be punished with disciplines or fasts, and such like things, as is customary in religious Orders, but he decided that they should be punished in the most rigorous manner imaginable; that is to say (as I have mentioned in the first paragraph), by being dismissed and expelled from his houses. And if the Congregation is not very ready to expel a disobedient, obstinate, self-willed subject, it is out of kindness, to give him opportunity of amendment; and where this does not follow, God so disposes that the subject goes away of his own accord, lest his bad example should corrupt the others. Obedience is, therefore, an unspeakable benefit, and disobedience and self-will are equally great evils; and God grant that he who, to avoid obedience, goes out of the

Congregation may not also be in danger of being shut out of Paradise! Certainly if this be his vocation and he abandons it, we can hope for little good from him, but must fear every evil. "Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."⁸

184 Let us examine ourselves, my beloved fathers and brothers, as to how highly we prize this obedience; if at times we are careless in obeying, were it only in the slightest matters; if we willingly obey one and not another; if we are not ready at the call of the sacristan, porter, or other officers, in those things which concern their offices, as the rule enjoins; if we manage to incline the will of Superiors to our own, as is often done in certain disingenuous ways, contrary to holy simplicity. For there is a vast difference in the way in which we represent things to the Superior; shown under one aspect, he may consent; under another, he will refuse. But what is all this? Do we think, perchance, to deceive God? Our Superiors, perhaps, we may deceive, but not God, who sees the heart, and thus sees that we wish to perform our own and not His will. If this is the case, it shows that we have no true esteem for holy obedience.

XI.

To value it rightly, we should consider it as a most singular Excellence of our Congregation. Not that our obedience has more value or merit in itself; for, properly speaking, it has less than that of him who has vowed obedience, because by that vow a person, in giving up at one stroke his whole will, has given for ever both the tree and its fruits. But our will is always free, even unto death, like that of Jesus Christ, who of His own free will obeyed His Heavenly Father, and sacrificed His life out of voluntary obedience, "because it was His own will;"⁹ and therefore we can, through the ardour of our charity, equal the merit of those who have made the vow. In a certain sense it is easier for us to couple obedience with charity; not that he who is bound by vow can-
185 not do as much, but, being bound by vow, he cannot disobey without sin; and he often obeys without much reflection, simply to avoid sin and because he cannot help it; whereas he who is free, that is, who can without sin avoid obeying, may more easily be moved to obey purely

⁸ 1 Cor. x. 12.

⁹ Isa. liii. 7.

through love: indeed, it is difficult for him to obey unless he actually makes at least an implicit act of love of God. Our obedience is therefore beautiful because it is not moved nor compelled by any fear, but purely by the love we bear to God, and because we obey when we might disobey, being free. This is precisely what is praised by Ecclesiasticus in him who might transgress and did not: *Potuit transgredi et non est transgressus* [he could have sinned, and did not sin].¹⁰

This voluntary obedience of ours is a precious treasure and gift, and will ever be one of our most special Excellences if we practise it in the manner enjoined by our holy Father, and it is able to lead us to great perfection; for he who has this firm and stable purpose in all things and always to obey the Institute and his Superiors, without doubt obeys God Himself, and possesses one of the greatest graces that can be enjoyed in community, namely, the certainty of doing right even in his smallest actions, and he can truly say: "I know when God wills that I should rise in the morning or make my prayer; when He wishes me to hear confessions or preach. I know how He desires I should be dressed, maintained, and treated;" and thus he has the great privilege of never undertaking or laying aside anything during his whole life through his own will, but of always doing the will of God. He is, moreover, certain that he can never be mistaken in obeying, even if his Superior is mistaken; and obedience, as St John Climacus tells us, will always excuse him before God. And if, so to speak, God were to reprove a member of the Congregation with not having practised as much penance as the Capuchins, nor as many fasts as the Camaldolese, nor laboured for His glory as much as many of his brothers did, he might justly excuse himself by saying that obedience did not permit him to do more; and his obedience would be a legitimate excuse before God. Thus the truly obedient man walks ever with sure steps, so that if he were obliged by obedience to deal with perverse bad women in order to win them to God, his thoughts will be as pure as those of an angel; while if he were to remain in his cell through his own will, he would perhaps burn with sinful imaginations. In short, he who obeys experiences how sweet and beneficial is the government of God, and he will soon find himself filled with good desires, enriched with virtue, and protected by the Lord, who hath called him and led him to Himself; as holy David said: "The Lord ruleth me, and I shall

¹⁰Eccclus. xxxi. 10.

want nothing. He hath set me in a place of pasture. He hath brought me up on the water of refreshment: He hath converted my soul."¹¹

187 But if any one has not a due esteem of the obedience practised in the Congregation to which we have been called, this prerogative will prove to him a torment as great as its delight would have been had he valued it rightly. Instead of its being an anticipation of Paradise, it becomes to him a foretaste of hell. The obedient man tastes the joys of Paradise in the security which he enjoys of performing the will of God; but whoever resists obedience undergoes the pains of hell: for in desiring to follow his own will in opposition to that of his Superiors, he encountered hardships, disgusts, and punishment, if not from his Superiors, at any rate from himself, through the remorse which rends his heart, and through his own passion of self-love, which by its very nature turns his bosom into a sea of unrest. Happy, therefore, is he who is faithful to obedience, like Abraham, of whom it is written: "There was not found the like to him in glory, who kept the law of the Most High. Therefore by an oath He gave him glory in his posterity, that he should increase as the dust of the earth."¹²

¹¹Ps. xxii. 1-3.

¹²Ecclus. xlv. 20, 22.

CHAPTER 6

THE SIXTH EXCELLENCE

DISCRETION, SWEETNESS, AND PRUDENCE IN GOVERNMENT

Even if the Congregation of St Philip had no other good quality to render it worthy of esteem and love, the very discretion, sweetness, and prudence which its sons display in its government would, I think, suffice to show its value. Although it desires to see its sons grow ever more and more fervent in contempt of the world and in the love of Jesus Christ, in the spirit of charity, mortification, humility, and the exact observance of their rules, still it is never severe towards delinquents, as are many religious communities, because it seeks to gain everything from its subjects through love, nothing by compulsion. If there be grave faults, or if any one proves obdurate in his disobedience, and after repeated warnings shows no sign of amendment, the Congregation dismisses him from its house with all possible gentleness. This is the utmost severity which it employs, as we shall see in Chapter XII. With regard to other omissions and faults, the Superiors, while they are vigilant in admonishing and correcting, do it with all possible tenderness and consideration, and they never give either indiscreet penances or too severe reproofs, remembering that they themselves, as the Apostle says, and as our rules remind us, are subject to temptations and faults, and that therefore they should act in such wise as to appear rather to be correcting their own faults than those of others, in order the more easily to bring back transgressors to the right path. Man is proud by his nature (corrupted by original sin). If you correct him imperiously, with harsh contemptuous words, or with severe punishments, he is easily provoked to anger, and does not amend. If, on the contrary, he is corrected with gentleness, he readily submits. Therefore we should follow the maxim of St Francis de Sales, who used to say: "If we can heal a wound with oil, why pour vinegar into it?" When a Superior gives orders or corrections in a proud, domineering spirit, he re-opens

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the wound instead of healing it, and he merits the reproof which God gave by the mouth of Ezechiel to certain Superiors who were wanting in love and discretion: "You have ruled over them with rigour and with a high hand."¹ This, thank God, is not the method used in our Congregation, where despotism has from the beginning been abhorred like the plague; on the contrary, everything is done "in the spirit of gentleness," as prescribed by the Institute; for gentleness is the special virtue which makes a Superior beloved by all. By this he gives
 190 liberty to his subjects to seek him at all hours, and emboldens them to speak to him and confide to him all their troubles. If, on the other hand, he were easily annoyed or made angry, he would prove himself unworthy to command others, being unable to command himself: he would make himself difficult of access, and his subjects, being always doubtful whether he were in a good or bad humour, would not have recourse to him, and he would neither console those in sorrow nor afford remedy to those under temptation, and the yoke of obedience and observance would prove a heavy one.

It is true that if the Superior, who is but a man like the rest, should break out into some fit of anger, his subjects should not let themselves be readily scandalized or downcast, but must excuse and bear with him; for it is not so easy, in the midst of a multitude of various occupations, always to preserve a perfect equability of temper and language. Some troublesome business, or the annoyance caused by the fault of one of his subjects, or want of health, may suffice to disturb his gentleness. And if one of you were in his place, you would, perhaps, be much worse. Father Paolo Segneri, of the Society of Jesus, used to say that our Lord forgives more readily the omissions and imperfections of those who are burdened with many serious occupations, because their mind is filled with so many things, that it has not the time for proper reflection; and their falls are generally involuntary and merely passing ones, and to such as these even men of approved virtue are subject,
 191 as we shall shortly see. Moreover, this might occasionally happen in punishment of your faults, which cause God to withdraw from the Superior the light and prudence necessary for your guidance, as he threatened through the mouth of Osee: "I will give thee a king in my wrath."²

¹Ezech. xxxiv. 4.

²Osee xiii. ii.

I.

A Superior must also be as humble as he is gentle; and he will be so if he seriously reflects that although his position is higher, this alone does not make him better than the others, but that he may be very inferior to them in merit; and that he has to govern, not subjects of the world, but the sons of God, who are like so many gods.

At the same time, although he must be humble, he should not degrade himself. His humility must be in proper keeping, lest by practising it more than is fitting, he might end by losing part of his authority, and, by abasing himself beyond proper limits before subjects of no great understanding, he might find greater difficulty in keeping them to their duty. A Superior should so temper his humility that his subjects may have reason to fear the power he possesses and yet may not deem him proud, because they are constantly seeing him practise some edifying act of humility; according to the advice of St Gregory: "Let them see from the manner in which we exercise our authority what it is they have to fear, and learn from our humility that they should imitate." In short, a Superior must be humble but not despicable, and, as St Bernard says: "Grave, but not austere; of serene countenance, and of serious speech." Gentleness and humility will render a Superior kind and discreet. 192

But these, again, are not sufficient for the government of his subjects: he has need also of wisdom, which consists in governing them from spiritual motives and on Divine principles, derived from zeal for the glory of God and for their salvation, not from temporal considerations, nor from the policy of human prudence. St Thomas of Canterbury, writing to Pope Alexander III. and the Cardinals respecting the differences between the Holy See and King Henry II. of England, said: "The Church is to be governed not with subtlety or artifice, but with justice and truth." Neither should the Congregation be governed with artifice, subtleties of mind, or carnal prudence, which is the enemy of God, but with justice and truth. Its members themselves do not wish to be governed by the laws of the world, for they have not left the world in order to be ruled by worldly maxims, nor do they place themselves under obedience for any other reason than to be guided by their superiors as the representatives of God. I do not say, that we may not with a view to convince some minds bring forward finally some good human reasons, but we must use them only as aids, and never

193 rely upon them as our chief support. The reasons which affect our eternal salvation are the most satisfactory to each one, for there is no one who wishes to be lost.

Prudence obliges a Superior to set before his subjects a good example of observance of the rules and of all virtues; as St Paul writes to St Timothy, Bishop of Ephesus: "Be thou an example of the faithful, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in chastity;"³ and as St Gregory remarks: "Let the ruler show himself to be foremost in good works, that by his own life he may show the road to his subjects." Prudence, moreover, moderates a too hasty or fiery zeal, and teaches the Superior not to correct or punish his subjects, who are guilty of some fault, in the heat of his own or of their passion, but to wait for a more suitable time, in which they may more surely reap the fruit of it. All are not able to bear correction or advice at every time, either from vivacity of age or of temperament, or because they think there is some excuse for their fault, or because it appears to them very trifling and of little account. It is often necessary to be silent, to appear not to see things, and to await in patience a more fitting opportunity. Often the grace of their vocation, with the continual force of the good examples which they see in others, works of itself; and in thus acting we shall not be tolerating inobservance and abuses, but taking the most sure means for uprooting them.

194 Man, says St Gregory Nazianzen, is the most changeable and diversified of all animals. You will not find two of the same kind. Some are led by example, others by words; some require the spur to make them advance, others the bit to keep them back. Praise will be useful for one and give him fresh strength; another will be puffed up by it, and require to be humbled. Some should be encouraged, others mortified; some in public, others privately. Severity is useful to some, gentleness to others. To guide such a variety of persons according to their characters and dispositions, great power of mind and a very clear discernment are needed. To obtain this we must pray much. Yes, the Superior must be a man of prayer, because bearing the whole burthen of the house, he needs the special assistance of God, and that supernatural gift which St Paul calls "the grace of government."⁴ He requires also the gift of wisdom, which enables him who possesses it not only to

³ 1 Tim. iv. 12.

⁴ 1 Cor. xii. 28.

contemplate heavenly things, but also, as St Thomas teaches, to regulate his own human actions and those of others according to the Divine laws. If Solomon, in order to build a material temple, asked God for the rays of that infinite wisdom which created the world: "Send Thy wisdom out of Thy holy heaven and from the throne of Thy majesty, that she may be with me, and may labour with me,"⁵ how much more will this wisdom be needed, to work, not upon inanimate things, but upon free souls, and to render them vessels of grace! If we stand in extreme need of prayer to regulate our temporal affairs, much more do we need it in spiritual matters, that we may not meet with the same fate as Josue and the princes of the people of Israel, who, from not having consulted the mouth of the Lord, were deceived by the Gabaonites.⁶ 195

II.

We have seen that the above-mentioned qualities are necessary for every prelate of Holy Church and every Superior of religious Orders or Congregations for the guidance of their subjects; let us now see how our Congregation of the Oratory acts in this matter.

Whether the Superior be acting alone in that which concerns his own office, or whether, in union with the four Deputies who assist him in the government of the Congregation, he has to remedy existing or possible abuses, or to correct the fault of some subject which he does not think fit to undertake by himself on account of the matter being important, in every case, having first having recourse to God in prayer, he studies the most discreet and gentle manner, the most prudent and suitable means, and above all the most fitting moment, so as to avoid giving occasion of temptation to subjects who are free.

He should indeed correct the faults of his subjects, and should do it with zeal, but with a discreet zeal, tempered with humility, gentleness, respect, and reserve. He should use the same discretion with his subjects which he would wish to be used towards himself were he one of them. The natural law obliges him to do this much. And this discretion and sweetness must be universal, and not partial, used with all, and not only with a few, as well in providing for their temporal necessities as in correcting their faults or in advising and urging them 196

⁵Wisdom ix. 10.

⁶Josue ix. 14.

to advance in virtue and to perform their duties more perfectly. How admirable it is to hear it said of a Superior that he watches over us and corrects us as a father! On the other hand, how unbecoming to hear it said: "Oh! how indiscreet he is, trying to take us whither the spirit of the Institute does not send us nor prudence lead us!"

Thanks be to God! it would seem that this beautiful prerogative of discretion, sweetness, and prudence flourishes in the government of our Congregation. This was the spirit of St Philip, our Founder, and it is the true spirit of Jesus Christ.

This sweetness and discretion mortifies and humbles whomsoever practises it. For a Superior who discovers defects in his subjects and is obliged to correct them, would wish to find some way of effecting this speedily, and, on the other hand, fears that the moment is not favourable, or that the subject who is in fault will not take the mortification well and profitably. It is clear that the same correction given to one subject will carry him with one bound, not merely to complete amendment, but even to perfection, and given to another might throw him off the line and drive him out of the Congregation, being always free to leave it.

197 Father Consolini used to say that all have not the spirit of mortification, and in fact St Philip, who had this discretion and the discernment of spirits, mortified some of his subjects nearly every day, and sometimes several times in the day; but some very rarely, and some never. If, therefore, a Superior perceives some of his subjects to be either tepid in the service of God, or inobservant, or too much addicted to their own opinions, and inattentive when warned, and yet without sufficient light or strength to improve, he will be grieved that he cannot do them good, but must mortify himself by bearing with them, and waiting until God gives more light and strength to those who are weak and in darkness. These are the ordinary crosses of Superiors, and if they bear them well, will not only enrich them with merits, but oblige God to grant them their desire, viz., the correction of their subjects.

The Venerable Father Fabrizio dall' Aste, founder of the Congregation of the Oratory of Forlì, as we read in the fourth volume of the Historical Memoirs of Father Marciano, knew so well how to unite the zeal of a Superior with the gentleness and discretion of a father, that he obtained his ends without repelling the offender. One day at table in

the refectory, where the silence is never broken except by the Superior or the Minister for some want which may occur, a father raised his voice a little to ask for water to mix with his wine. Fabrizio remarked this contravention of the rule, and was very much displeased, but he said nothing for the moment. Meeting this father afterwards alone on his way to the church, he tenderly accosted him, and putting his hand on his shoulder, begged him to mortify himself by not speaking at table. The gentle correction was so efficacious that this father never again committed the same fault. He corrected in no less gentle and ingenious a manner a father who had with a somewhat indiscreet zeal mortified one of the boys who are in the habit of coming to the Oratory, for he gave him a little picture of our loving Saviour surrounded by children, with the words, "Suffer children to come to me."⁷ The father understood by the mysterious gift the intention of Fabrizio, and in future moderated his excessive zeal. 198

He corrected another father in a silent but most efficacious manner. This father was acting as porter, for want of brothers; the post is a tiresome one, for very often the bell will be rung ten or twenty times in one hour. One day in a fit of impatience he cast his keys on the ground. The good Superior, who arrived just in time to see this action, so unbecoming a son of St Philip, did not say a word or show the least anger, but stooping down, he took up the keys, and during a whole week fulfilled with the greatest care the office of porter, although he was Provost and founder of the Congregation. Moved at length by such an example, the priest in confusion asked pardon of Fabrizio, resumed his office, and exercised it not only without annoyance, but to his great consolation.

III.

I could quote countless similar examples, for there have been many Superiors of our Congregation no less ingenious than gentle and discreet in the correction of the faulty; and if any one through excessive zeal has sometimes acted harshly and given a rather more severe reproof, he has acknowledged himself to be in the wrong, and has done penance for it as for no light offence. 199

⁷St Luke xviii. 16.

Father Consolini, when Superior, one day corrected a brother; and thinking he had done it too severely, he was observed to retire speedily to his room full of confusion, and falling prostrate on the ground, with his arms in the form of a cross, with deep sighs he besought pardon of God. Another time, when asked the reason why his habit was dusty and dirty, he replied that it was his wickedness, because in detestation of the severity he had shown in giving a correction he had rolled in the dust.

A brother of this Congregation told me that our Father Giuseppe Varda, the Superior, one day corrected him for some slight fault with too much warmth. He went immediately to his room, and in a short time, on coming out, found Father Varda before his door prostrate on the ground, who said to him, "I will not rise until you have forgiven me the excessive rigour I have shown you."

Such are the falls of perfect men, who rise again with greater merit, and, like true sons of St Philip, punish in themselves every fault, however slight, against the gentleness so much recommended to us by the holy Father, and which ought to be practised by all the Superiors of our
200 Congregation. Their government should be guided by charity in compassionating and bearing with every one, gentleness in admonishing, discretion in correcting and imposing mortifications, and prudence in doing this at seasonable times. Father Consolini, who as for forty years Master of novices, and who governed the Roman house as Provost after the death of the Saint, wrote these words to a father: "Let your Reverence take care to do violence to no one, bearing always with patience and charity the doings of all." "I think," he writes, "I may say to Father Jerome what I should do myself, and that is, that I would receive this mortification as joyously as I could. I should not think of more than one thing at a time; and if things do not turn out as I desire, I should say, that does not depend on me." To another he wrote as follows: "Your Reverence will have great merit before God in bearing with charity all these things which you describe, and believe me, our blessed Father, who so loved mortification, will thus be well served by you, and will console you in his own good time."

In short, this discretion, accompanied by sweetness and prudence, so ties our hands that we ought never to exact anything by compulsion from the subjects of our Congregation, not even the good works to which we are bound in community. Experience proves to us that

his gentle method of government gains more than could be obtained by the utmost severity, besides maintaining peace and concord in the community, which is worth more than all other laws, especially to us, who have for our rule Charity, *In vinculo charitatis* [in the bond of 201 charity], on which are founded all our constitutions.

IV.

The same discretion, gentleness, and prudence which are practised in our Congregation in correcting and bearing with the faults of our subjects, are also practised in laying upon them the fatigues of hearing confessions, of preaching, and of their respective offices, in corporal penances, and in tending them during sickness. Although the Congregation desires its subjects not to refuse labours, and knows full well that, if the Institute is to be properly observed, there is no little work for all, between external occupations and those of the house; yet it never intends to lay a greater burthen on any one than he can bear, but on "every one according to his ability."⁸ The sermons are not distributed by turns, but the Prefect of preachers gives to one more, to another less, to the best of his judgment; because one may be able to preach four times a month, and another not more than twice; and so with the other works, the burthen must be proportioned to the strength, and if any one feel himself overworked, he has only to represent his case to the Superior, who, when he sees the state of things, will have no difficulty in lightening his labours, or relieving him from them altogether.

When St Philip saw Father Baronio so occupied with his great work on Ecclesiastical History and with offices of the Congregation, 202 and yet unwilling to be waited upon, he ingeniously sent Father Giovanni Matteo Ancina with a false key to sweep out his room; and when he perceived that Baronio ate too sparingly and never satisfied his hunger, he often sent him back after supper to eat a second time. He wrote to Father Alessandro Borla, who had through overwork fallen dangerously ill, and was then convalescent at Naples, in these terms: "The Father commands you not to rise at night, but to go to rest in such time as to be able to lie in bed seven hours. After dinner he bids you rest for half an hour, more or less, according to the needs of nature.

⁸ Matt. xxv. 15.

And do not let either yourself or others imagine that this will be an easy life, because he who labours in so many ways, as a good priest must do, in saying Office, Mass, in mental prayer, study, and speaking on holy things, and preaching, will be so worn, that if he also undergoes bodily fatigue, and does not take the necessary rest, he will soon fall under his burden, or, if he does not fall, will not be able to perform the exercises of the spiritual life with due vigour of mind. Take, therefore, all you need in the way of eating and drinking, clothing and sleep; and if you must be excessive, be so in gentleness, humility, patience, and charity, which are good things in themselves. Other corporal things, such as fasts, watchings, austerities, are only good in so far as they lead to charity and the other interior virtues, and the good of the soul. Do not resume your labours unless you feel yourself perfectly recovered
 203 and restored to your former strength; otherwise remember that we do not wish that you should be here to kill yourself."

In this way St Philip sought to moderate the fervour of his sons by holy discretion, which is the virtue St Antony preferred to all others, for without it the other virtues are not enduring. We must remark the expression used, *The Father commands*; for St Philip never employed the word *command* on other occasions. Following his example, our Superiors never use it except in like circumstances. They will say: *Your Reverence would oblige me by doing such a thing—If you like to do it—If it does not inconvenience you—If you would be kind enough to do it*, or similar expressions. But when it is a case of restraining the fervour of some one, so as to prevent his falling into excess, the term "command" may be safely used, as the holy Father did with Father Borla; because it is of great importance to moderate indiscreet fervour, which engages us in oppressive or in excessive corporal austerities, which impair the health.

This wish to perform many penances and more than are suited to our strength, is often a temptation of the devil, who by this means endeavours to deprive a subject of his health, so as to prevent his doing any work either for himself or for others. He who wishes to go on well and without delusions must never perform extra penances, in addition to those prescribed by the rules, without first asking leave
 204 of the Superior or Director. St Francis de Sales used to say that if he had been in some religious community, he would have been satisfied with the penances prescribed by the rules, without seeking for others;

and even in these he would have avoided singularity, but would have endeavoured above all to observe the rule exactly.

It may be said that this spirit of penance may sometimes be good, but I say that it is good and safe only when guided by obedience, otherwise it may easily lead to such excesses as totally to destroy the bodily health. Tarugi whenever, during his government of the Congregation of Naples, he observed some father or brother looking pale and thin, would immediately send for him with loving solicitude and ask him minutely how he felt, seeking for the reason of this change of appearance, and with gentle violence he would force him to tell him freely if there were anything he wanted, that he might procure it for him. When in the refectory he saw anyone not eating, he at once beckoned to the waiter, and bade him tell that father from him to eat as much as he needed; and he was wont to say to the novices, that it was pleasing to God that they should eat, provided that in everything they were grateful to the Divine Majesty, observing the words of St Paul: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God."⁹ For the person who ruins his constitution by not eating what he requires, or through any other indiscreet labours or penances, is no longer fit for the service of God.

205

It must greatly console us all, and oblige us to return thanks to God, to know that in the government of our Congregation are found so much discretion, sweetness, and prudence, both in bearing with and correcting faults, and in regulating labours and penances, and taking discreet care of each one. If perchance this discretion should be no longer practised among us, this would be not because the Congregation has lost this good spirit, but because we practise it towards ourselves perhaps more than necessary, and are too soft and delicate.

Let us cast a glance at the first companions of St Philip. What labours did they undergo for the glory of God and the good of their neighbour, and how forgetful were they of themselves! The holy Father himself was obliged to use discretion for them. But are all his sons now like them? Those who are gifted with great capacity and talents might perhaps work much more than they do if they did not fear to lose their health through every slight fatigue. I do not say that they ought to be indiscreet, taking upon themselves every burthen without consideration, and expecting others to exercise discretion for them while

⁹ 1 Cor. x. 31.

they neglect it themselves. I do not wish to be myself indiscreet while speaking of discretion, but I should wish that there were not so much delicacy, not so many fears among us. The fear that every breath of air may do us harm comes from such delicacy as should be far from men professing an apostolic life. For example, if you were hearing confes-
 206 sions, or studying, or preparing a sermon in a place in which there was a draught which might prove injurious, remedy it as best you can, for this would be discretion, and not delicacy.

But if you were obliged to go out and visit a sick person, or assist the dying, or to prevent some sin, would you fear heat or cold, rain or wind? You must then trust in God, who lays you under that necessity. Either He will defend you from every evil and shield you from inclement weather, or if He permit you to suffer some harm, it will be to furnish you with an occasion of merit, to teach you that it is your glory that souls should cost you also something, while they have cost Him a sea of torments.

Father Paolo Segneri, of the Society of Jesus, who was renowned for his exemplary life and the fervour of his missions, was one day warming himself at the Community fire with the other fathers. One of them going out of the room left the door a little open, the day being very windy. Father Segneri begged him of his charity to shut the door, and he answered: "O Father, in a few days your Reverence will go to give missions, when I know you walk barefoot on ice and snow, and now you are afraid of a little air!" Father Segneri replied: "That is true, but at present I must take care of myself; then it will rest with God." This is what we must do. When we are not called on to labour at the risk of our health, we should take moderate care of it; but when we
 207 are obliged to work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, let us trust in God and not pay so much attention to it.

Whoever intends to serve God and his neighbour, says St Teresa, must set little store by his health. Look at soldiers in the service of their prince, or servants in that of their masters, how they expose their health to every risk, and think of nothing but obeying and serving. All this they do for a trifling reward. And can we not do it for an eternal reward? We must renounce our love for our bodies, so fond of being indulged, otherwise we shall never be capable of great things.

If the devil tries to terrify us by persuading us we shall lose our health by studying, hearing confessions, preaching, or other labours

in the service of the Congregation, we shall never do anything, except cause astonishment in others, who perceive right well our weakness. And again, what can they think when they see us in the refectory refusing first one and then another kind of food from fear of their disagreeing with us, although they see we are quite well? I can easily believe that there are certain temperaments and hidden diseases to which some kinds of food are injurious; and when any one has really experienced this, and knows that such and such things do him harm and increase his indisposition, he must leave them; and if the remainder of the food does not suffice, he should state it to the Father Superior or the Father Minister, who will not fail to provide other food for him. But we must be very careful not to be misled by our imaginations, and that certain doubts and fears arising from temptations do not make us seek singularity, which offends the whole Community and gives occasion for remarks. And if the Superiors know this to be your case, what can they do? Should they ask you to take more care of yourself, when you already take too much? St Teresa says that when the illness is notable it readily makes itself known, but we must not pay attention to trifling ailments. Nature often cures itself and, moreover, you cannot tell what the grace of your vocation may be able to effect. There are persons with little health who, to avoid singularity, partake of everything brought to table, and who by degrees become strong; on the other hand, some of robust health, who try to lie by the rules of Galen and Hippocrates, are apt to lose it; and God permits this for their chastisement. Some give up prayer, study, the confessional, or other Community duties for the slightest headache; to-morrow they omit them again because they have had one, and three days hence lest they should have another. 208

And they say in excuse that they have leave from the Father. Yes, he easily gives leave, because, not seeing your interior, he supposes that you have some just cause for asking it, and he is afraid of failing in charity if he denies it: and when there is a doubt, he will say, It is better that you should be in fault than that I should. When there is some real necessity, if the Superior does not perceive it and make proper provision, nor the Infirmarian nor the Minister nor the Deputies, who all watch over this, then it lies with you to mention it frankly, since no one is bound to guess it; and if you are not discreetly attended to, complain gently, for you will have some reason. But I am persuaded that you will 209

never have occasion to do so, for in the many Congregations which I have frequented I have never heard the slightest complaint upon this point, and in all of them holy discretion still reigns.

Let the sons of St Philip therefore give due thanks to God; for in the Congregation they are sure of being treated with tenderness and governed with love, and of finding in their Superior the heart of a father who will always receive them kindly, and be ever ready to listen to them, to console them, and provide for them in their necessities, asking in return only for a filial confidence.

And it is most important for Superiors to act in this manner, that they may make themselves beloved rather than feared, and not place their subjects in danger of temptation; because, being free to leave the Congregation at any time, these might easily be frightened by too much severity and tempted to depart, and the Superior would have to give an account to God for having occasioned their loss by his excessive rigour. Let Superiors follow the advice of St Bernard, who says: "Learn that you ought to be mothers, and not masters of your subjects. Study to be loved rather than feared; and if at times severity be necessary, let it be paternal, and not tyrannical." And let them ever remember the
210 words of St Paul, "Instruct in the spirit of meekness."¹⁰

This spirit of discretion, sweetness, and prudence is that which will maintain the Congregation of St Philip, and will guide its subjects to perfection, and to perseverance even unto death. Where this spirit of charity is wanting, it will be destroyed; and few subjects, if they were governed with rigour, would be constant in pursuing their vocation.

V.

The Holy Father by his teaching, his example, and the rules which he left us, impressed this spirit of discretion, sweetness and prudence upon his sons, because it is the spirit of Jesus Christ Himself, who thus governed the Apostolic College. Ponder upon the warnings which our Saviour gave to His Apostles, the rebukes and corrections He administered, the rules, maxims and doctrines which He preached to them; all breathe a spirit of discretion and sweetness, and show forth a prudence wholly divine.

¹⁰Gal. vi. 1.

He left us a memorable example of this when, wishing to cure St Thomas of the disease of his incredulity, He would not do it at once, but waited for eight days. *Post dies octo venit Jesus* [after eight days Jesus went there]. The sacred commentators have sought with pious curiosity for the cause wherefore our Divine Master waited for more than a week before He took steps to heal a disciple so seriously ill. Either He could not do it sooner, or He would not. To say that He could not would be to deny the omnipotence of God; to say that He would not would be to doubt the love of Christ, the inexhaustible fountain of goodness, *qui pertransiit benefaciendo et sanando omnes* [who went about doing good, and healing everybody], who loved all, and His Apostles above the rest; and love accelerates rather than retards graces, as the seraphic doctor teaches. Wherefore, then, did not Christ appear to St Thomas before the eighth day? St John Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Euthymius found, amongst others, one reason for this which is marvellously adapted to our subject. The delay, they say, was for no want of power or of will, but was a mystery of instruction for all Superiors of religious houses, directors of souls, parents and masters; teaching them, namely, never to offer a remedy to any person who stands in need of it, unless he be properly disposed to receive it and to derive benefit from it. Our Saviour put off His second coming advisedly for eight days, that by means of the other disciples, who were constantly assuring him that they had seen their risen Lord, St Thomas might be properly prepared, and the medicine of the correction might be opportune and efficacious. 211

We have another beautiful sample of this necessary prudence in the prophet Nathan. He went to heal King David, mortally wounded by two grave sins of homicide and adultery. Mark well his conduct. He did not say at his first entrance, "I am sent to thee by God, to make known to thee thy hateful wounds." He did not say, "Thou art a wicked and impure king, ungrateful for the many benefits God has showered upon thee." But, hiding the knife of correction with which he wished to lay open his wounds, he recounted a parable to him in which an imaginary person committed his own sins; and when he saw that the king himself condemned his own guilt, depicted in a third person, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this is a child of death,"¹¹ he then brought forth the knife and courageously used 212

¹¹ 2 Kings xii. 5.

it, saying, *Thou art the man!* And David was at once cured, because, with hearty sorrow and sincere confession, he instantly exclaimed, "I have sinned against the Lord," and the holy prophet assured him of pardon, "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin." St John Chrysostom admires this great prudence of the prophet Nathan, saying, "O wisdom of the physician! He enters bearing the sword with which to operate on the wound; but he does not let the sick man see it, lest he might shrink from the remedy. When the time is come, he operates immediately, and without much injury cuts off the wounded part." Let us learn from Nathan how to treat wounds and falls. Let us learn to restrain our indiscreet zeal, and to temporize in order to wound more opportunely. Let us learn to let pass the accesses of fever, that is, the ebullitions of anger and the other vehement passions. Let us learn not to display haughtily the rod of authority, to suspend at first the harshness of rigour, and to keep back biting reproofs.

213 If Christ had entered into the Cœnaculum when Thomas was disputing with his companions, and persisting in his declaration, "I will not believe," and had said to him, "O thou incredulous, ignorant, obstinate, ungrateful man," what would have become of him? But He only appeared to him after eight days, when his paroxysm had begun to decline; and He did not use the knife—"Be not faithless but believing"—until after He had fully satisfied him with the sight of His blessed wounds. O God! how many repentant Thomases might religious communities possess whom they now deplore as eternally lost! And for no other reason but because the Superiors were not true Nathans, but, transported by unseasonable fervour, knew not how to find the opportune moment and to hide the rod! How many religious would be perfect if their Superiors had chosen a fitting season for their correction, and had handled them with discretion and sweetness! But when they find themselves treated with excessive rigour which they cannot escape, instead of advancing in virtue and in the observance of their rules, they take, as it were out of spite, the opposite direction, and are lost. How many nuns would have become saints if their Abbesses had sought a fitting time in which to cure them of their defects! But because they correct them without any regard to time or place, or to their being disposed to take the advice or penance well, instead of amending them, they drive them to the brink of despair.

Now if this want of discretion, sweetness, and prudence in Supe-

rriors may easily cause the loss of cloistered religious and nuns, how 214
 much more likely is it to cause the loss of the subjects of our Congregation of the Oratory, who are always free to leave it whenever they choose? In religious Orders there may be a remedy; for if a religious who has been treated indiscreetly by his Superior strays from the right path, he can be brought back by another Superior who is prudent and discreet, and who may succeed the former one; and the same applies to nuns who change their Superior every three years.

But if by mischance these qualities were ever to be wanting in the Superiors of the Congregation of St Philip, what remedy could be found when the subjects had been forced to leave it through their indiscretion and excessive rigour? My heart trembles at the thought of such a case. A remedy may restore life or may cause death; at the right time it will restore life, at the wrong time it will cause death. And what life, what death? A life superhuman, angelic, and divine; or a death which never dies, and deprives us of every good by depriving us of God.

I know not whether this discretion, combined with sweetness and prudence, has ever failed in any of our Congregations; there may have been some instance of it, as we are but men; but I never heard of one. I know well that our Rules contain all that is necessary for their observance, and that the same Rules teach us to practise this discretion. I know also that all those who frequent our houses consider it to be, as I assert, a singular prerogative granted by God to our Congregation, 215
 and they all see clearly that it could not exist without it. I thank God that it is still preserved, as it has ever been, in that in which I have the happiness to dwell, and in all those that I am acquainted with. And I declare once more that if this prerogative were to be wanting in any one of our houses, there would be much ground for fear that it would soon come to an end.

May God deliver us from so great an evil, and preserve for us that good which, in His infinite bounty, He has granted us.

CHAPTER 7

THE SEVENTH EXCELLENCE

THE ESTEEM OF VIRTUE

The Saviour of the world, in founding His Church, which was to resist the assaults of Jews and Gentiles, of heretics and tyrants, and of all the spirits of hell leagued together to destroy it, and which was to be so powerful that the gates of hell should not prevail against it, might have supported it either by the power of princes, or the learning of philosophers, or the subtle policy of the great. But on the contrary, He whose wisdom is as incomprehensible as His judgments are infallible, in contempt, as it would seem, of all human prudence, willed that it should be supported by some twelve poor fishermen, unknown, ignorant, destitute of learning, power, riches, or valour, without followers or adherents; who, far from being respected, were looked upon as the scum of the earth; men who were as if they had not been, and were hence called by the Holy Spirit "the foolish things of the world, the weak things of the world, and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, and things that are not."¹ On such as these did Christ found His kingdom and the monarchy which He willed to establish upon earth, and thus He wished to show to all men that He valued neither the power of kings, nor the riches of the great, nor the learning of the wise, but reserved all His esteem for virtue, which alone is worthy to attend Him on earth, and afterwards to ascend with Him into Heaven. 216

Our holy Father, Philip Neri, who always aspired to what was most perfect, and whose one aim was that his Congregation should be an image of the primitive Church, nay, of the Apostolic College, did not rest it on princes, philosophers, or statesmen; but founded it on virtue alone—that is, on the imitation of Christ and of His Apostles. He therefore chose for his first companions men of most virtuous lives; 217

¹ 1 Cor. i. 27.

and he laid down in his Rule that no one should be received into his houses except men of virtuous and approved conduct, *non nisi homines probatæ vitæ* [only men of proven life], bequeathing to us also this Excellence of the esteem of virtue.

And in fact our Congregation, thus guided by the holy Father as to its choice of subjects, pays no attention to their being of noble birth, or very rich, or very learned and prudent, but seeks only that they should be men of virtue, and disposed ever to increase in it, or capable of acquiring it if they do not already possess it, being persuaded that
 218 he who is really desirous of acquiring it will be sure to do so in the school of St Philip. Thus without virtue no natural talent is esteemed; and although some may have great natural gifts and talents, if they are unadorned by virtue little account is made of them, for, as the Apostle says, "Henceforth we know no man according to the flesh."² We judge of things only as they appear in the sight of God, who esteems natural gifts so little that He suffers even the devil to possess them, and who loves and prizes virtue alone, which alone makes us resemble Him.

Since therefore nobility, learning, prudence, and other talents are not esteemed in the Congregation, except in so far as they are instruments for the glory of God, and are united with virtue, the novices should hold in great reverence the most humble and abject offices of the Congregation, such as carrying candles at the High Mass, lighting and putting out the candles, changing the frontals of the altars, waiting in the refectory, sweeping out their own rooms, or the church, and such like things. These are the treasures, the Venerable Father Sozzini used to say, which our humble holy Father left us; and those who use them with love derive great benefit from them. I say that these offices are most profitable to him who performs them with love; for he who should do them with imperfection, with carelessness, and as if against his will, would not please God, nor the Congregation, nor himself; and he might very likely, annoyed at the lowliness of his state, either
 219 give up his vocation or else pursue it with great effort and without merit.

² 2 Cor. v. 16.

I.

In accepting subjects our Rule ordains that we must indeed examine whether they have the talents necessary for our exercises, but much more whether their minds, judgment, and opinions are conformable to the spirit of the community, and whether they are as if born for the Institute; otherwise they either abandon the vocation or they are harassed by their own uneasiness, which does not allow them to live at peace with any one.

The holy Father was very firm on this point, because there are persons of excellent qualities, but who never adapt themselves to the community life; and he made no account of such men, considering them incapable of acquiring perfection, and simply fitted to scandalize others, since they wish to live according to their own taste and caprice and to practice many singularities. When he remarked in any one of his sons a certain tenacity in his own judgment, he strenuously insisted on his overcoming it, imposing on him things quite opposed to it, relying on the words of the Apostle, "Be not wise in your own conceits."³

Our will is of so perverse a nature, and so dearly loves itself alone, according to St Catherine of Genoa, that it hates even unto death the good which accompanies it, and would rather destroy itself in its own chosen path than have some virtue for its companion. It wishes to do that good which its caprice dictates, rather than that which the Rule 220 orders or the community practices. Now subjects that are formed upon this model and who wish to regulate themselves according to their own will, however excellent their qualities may be, will never obtain any esteem in the houses of St Philip. They may be doctors well versed in the sacred canons or in theology; they may be renowned preachers, or gifted with great administrative abilities; they may be of high birth, of rare eloquence, and of pleasing address; but if they are not exact in the observance of the Rules, and prompt in obeying the Superior, the Sacristan, the Porter, and the other officers, as occasion requires, even in things hard and abject, according to the Institute; if they do not willingly give way to others in lawful things, but are, on the contrary, stubborn and discourteous; if they are not ready to fulfil the offices assigned to them, or to supply for others who are indisposed

³Rom. xii. 16.

or absent; if they despise reading in the church or refectory, or serving at table or in the sacristy, or serving Mass; and if, because they are of old standing or of great ability, they think highly of their own merit and refuse to perform these humble offices as being fit only for the novices,—such persons, I say, are held in no esteem in our Congregation.

221 If the gifts of nature, learning, science, and all that is so highly esteemed by persons in the world, who look more to appearances than to realities, were to be greatly prized here, many might desire to apply themselves entirely to study, to become great doctors, excellent rhetoricians, or deeply versed in speculative science. But as they see that these things in themselves are not much esteemed in the Congregation, they are easily led to apply themselves to virtue, and especially to humility, simplicity, and interior mortification, and not to set too much value on the rest, understanding that virtues, and not natural gifts or talents, make men saints and render them dear to God. I consider, therefore, as a most precious Excellence of our Congregation this esteem of virtue and disregard of all that is uncombined with virtue, because this spurs on our subjects to acquire it and to care for nothing else. And if they become truly virtuous they will, by the credit they will gain for the Congregation, enable it to do wonders for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. And because virtue merits an eternal reward by its union with the virtues and merits of Jesus Christ, they will oblige God Himself to esteem and honour them, and lastly to enrich them with a crown of glory. “The Lord hath loved them and adorned them; He hath clothed them with a stole of glory.”

CHAPTER 8

THE EIGHTH EXCELLENCE

DETACHMENT FROM POSSESSIONS

Our holy Father, observing that Christ, although possessed of all possible riches, made Himself poor for us, and wished that all His disciples should be detached and disinterested, gave up all the property of his family, and abandoned his home in his youth without ever revisiting it, renounced the rich inheritance of his uncle, and ardently desired that his sons should live detached from riches. He was deeply convinced that the love of money tyrannizes over the hearts of men, and makes them incapable of serving God; and that he who shakes off the yoke of this tyrant is pure and happy above all others, according to the saying of the wise man: "Blessed is the rich man that is found without blemish; and that hath not gone after gold, nor put his trust in money, nor in treasures. Who is he, and we will praise him? for he hath done wonderful things in his life."¹

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"What more wonderful," says St Bernard, "than to suffer from poverty in the midst of riches which our appetite hungers after? Shall not he justly be crowned who triumphs over himself, crucifying this longing desire?" St Philip wished to see his sons live in this blessed state; he would not let them take vows of poverty; he was content that each one should keep his own property, and possess money; but he required that they should be detached from all love of it, and should use it solely for necessities and not for superfluities. The holy Father wished us to fight at our own expense under the banner of Christ, each one retaining his patrimony, or any simple benefice he may have, and spending the surplus on some good work, without ever accumulating money, which, by the grace of God, is very well observed.

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This detachment from possessions is another Excellence of our Congregation, and is rendered all the more admirable by the absence

¹ Ecclus. xxxi. 8.

of a vow of poverty. All who have the good fortune to enter the Congregation must, from the beginning of their noviciate, prefer the simplest and poorest things; modestly providing their room with books and furniture fitting to their state, but in no way singular or valuable; mindful that if they have left the world, they should deprive themselves of what is superfluous, in imitation of our holy Father, who always lived in great poverty, and who was so desirous of being truly poor that he would often say: "Oh! that I might be reduced to beg even for a crust of bread! Would that I might come to be in want of
 224 sixpence, or even a penny for my support, and find no one to bestow it on me! I should esteem it a special favour from God if I were reduced to die in a hospital!" Thus will they obtain the promise which he made, that he would himself conduct to Paradise whomsoever was detached from earthly possessions.

I.

It was an ordinary saying of the holy Father, that "Whosoever wishes for money will never be a spiritual man." He used further to say, that the man who is possessed in any way by avarice will never advance; and that he had found by experience that men addicted to sensuality were more easily converted than those who are given to this vice. For this reason he called avarice "the plague of the soul." He also added, "Let the young beware of the sins of the flesh, and the old of avarice, and they will become saints." And experience shows that those whose thoughts and affections are immersed in earthly riches, become quite incapable of heavenly things. As the Apostle had styled avarice *Idolorum servitus* [slavery to idols], so did the Saint abhor the avaritious as idolaters. He used to know them by their countenances, and he said one day to a penitent who had with some eagerness amassed a little property, "My son, before you had this property you had the face of an angel, and I took pleasure in looking at you; but now your face is quite changed, you have lost your accustomed gladness, and become
 225 melancholy." And he reminded all "that as much love as we give to creatures, so much do we take from God." When he saw that any one was covetous, he conceived the worst possible opinion of him, and if such a one asked his leave to fast, he used to say, "No, sir; give alms." On the contrary, he so esteemed disinterestedness that he used

to say, "Give me ten really detached men, and with them I will undertake to convert the whole world." And in fact the Apostles did convert the world, not only because they were Apostles, but because they were detached. And all those men who have laboured for souls with great profit, gaining kingdoms and provinces for the Church, such as St Antony the Great, St Dominic, St Francis of Assisi, St Ignatius of Loyola, St Francis Xavier, our holy Father St Philip, and so many of his sons, Tarugi, Baronio, the Venerable Giovenale Ancina, and many others, were all utterly detached from worldly goods.

Christ before founding His Church willed to hear from His Apostles, "Behold, we have left all things." And St Peter said, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, not for filthy lucre's sake."² The Venerable Father Mariano Sozzini was desirous that disinterestedness should shine forth in the Fathers of the Oratory, particularly in their relations with persons in the world, to whom he wished them to declare by their conduct, "We seek your souls and not your worldly goods;" as the Apostle said, "I seek not the things that are yours, but you."³ And what do we want with property? Father Tarugi used to say, "Death will despoil us of all our goods; we shall then have to leave all behind, 226 however unwillingly; let us therefore give them up at once, together with all love for them, through the love of Jesus Christ; for any way we must throw them overboard. The tempest of the sea is rising, and the lovers of the world will have to despoil themselves without merit; but those who love God, and leave all for His sake, despoil themselves with much fruit, and will find their riches again in heaven, ennobled and multiplied a hundred-fold."

II.

Our Divine Lord, to show us how necessary it is for priests to live detached from worldly possessions, taught us a good lesson in the following incident. The Roman tax-gatherers came to Peter and said, "Doth not your Master pay the didrachma?"⁴ He said, Yes; and entering where Christ was, to inform Him of the tribute demanded, our Lord said, "Go to the sea and cast in a hook; and that fish which shall

² 1 Pet. v. 2.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 14.

⁴ Matt. xvii. 23.

first come up, take; and when thou hast opened its mouth, thou shall find a stater; take that and give it to them for me and thee." You never read in the Gospels of St Peter fishing with a hook, but always with a net. "He saw two brethren casting a net into the sea."⁵ At the lake of Genesareth after his call he fished with the net. "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught."⁶ After the resurrection of Christ, fishing with the other disciples, he also used the net: "Cast the net on the right side of the ship."⁷ Now what great mystery is hidden here? Peter fished always with a net, this time only was he to fish with a hook, and this by the order of Christ. "Cast in a hook." I will tell you. This time it was a question of fishing for money: "Thou shalt find a stater." When he seeks for money, he uses the hook and not the net. The hook takes one fish at a time; the net a large quantity. Behold the beautiful and important advice which our Saviour gave to each of His priests in this allegory, namely, that in fishing for money and temporal goods, they should leave the net and use the hook; they should take what is sufficient for food and clothing in moderation, according to their state of life, and leave aside ease and comfort. "He warns them to fly from avarice," observes St Clement of Alexandria. "Cast the hook," which will draw in what is needful for the support of nature; and use not the net, which endeavours to draw all the fish from the sea, that is, rents and houses, fields and vineyards, gardens and furniture. "Cast in the hook," to procure a patrimony proportionate to the ministry which you exercise; but not the net, to amass more property. You are permitted the use, but not the abuse of riches; to support yourself, but not to lay up treasures; but above all, what is here forbidden is the affection, the desire, the greed of riches and possessions "which is the root of all evils."⁸ The Apostle lifts the veil from this allegory by telling us very clearly that we must be satisfied with what is sufficient for food and clothing. "Having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content."⁹ Though nothing will satisfy sensuality, nature is content with little. What would you do with these superfluities? St Bernard says, "You have no need of these things either for

⁵ Matt. iv. 18.

⁶ Luke v. 4.

⁷ John xxi. 6.

⁸ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

⁹ 1 Tim. vi. 8.

Heaven or for immortality. Some prepare provisions for the journey for an unlimited time, but they may be cut off in a short time."

Our Venerable Father Giovenale Ancina so dearly loved poverty, that even after he became Bishop of Saluzzo, he observed it with great exactness, accepting merely what was necessary, and nothing more. He kept so few provisions in his house, that being one day visited by two bishops, he would have had no supper to set before them, had not God provided it through the charity of some friends. This great servant of God, whose beatification we hope for, used to call riches and other worldly goods *the dregs of the earth*, and he could not imagine how men could care for such vile things.

Father Pietro Consolini used to warn his novices that in buying anything they should not be influenced by the desire they might have for the thing in question, but solely by their need of it. "*I buy things*," he would say, "*but not attachments*;" because our attachments ruin us unawares. He was always careful not to become more attached to one thing than another, however useful it might be to him; and as he feared he was rather too fond of a fine copy of the works of St John Chrysostom, he deprived himself of it, and gave it to the library of the Congregation. He also taught them not to be parsimonious with artisans and tradespeople, but, on the contrary, to be liberal and punctual in paying them, and in the act of payment he used always to add, "Are you sure that you ought not to receive more?" As he did this himself he was most desirous to see others do likewise, adducing these words of Holy Scripture, "The wages of him that hath been hired by thee shall not abide with thee until the morning;"¹⁰ and also the example of St Philip, who was most careful in this matter. 229

Father Giovanni Matteo Ancina showed similar charity and detachment, and he answered one who was dissuading him from being so profuse, "It is better that the workman should have something of mine than I anything of his." Thus spoke and acted also the other disciples of our Saint; they spent very little upon themselves, but were most lavish in their alms, and they were decided enemies to all strife and lawsuits. The holy Father repulsed a person who was endeavouring to persuade him to claim some property of his which was detained by those who had no right to it; and Father Consolini said to one who advised him to take steps for the recovery of some of his property, that

¹⁰ Lev. xix. 13.

230 he had never yet gone to law, and had no intention of beginning. If, however, absolute necessity either on private or public grounds, or the interests of religion, force us into a lawsuit, let us be guided by the advice of learned and Christian lawyers.

We must live entirely detached from earthly possessions if we wish to be true sons of St Philip; and we must be convinced that this detachment which our holy Father requires from us is a great Excellence granted by God to the Congregation, since it is a most efficacious means of making us saints.

Father Consolini used to say that even a good person living in the world might, through a real detachment from the things of this world, equal and even surpass many cloistered religious, since, as St Augustine says, *Perfection consists in having no desires*. But if he places all his affection on these things, it is very difficult for him to save his soul, let alone to attain perfection; and it is in this sense that we understand these words of Christ: "How hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!"¹¹ And if this be difficult for a person living in the world, how must more so for a priest, who is under a stricter obligation to live detached from the world and the things of the world, in order to be more fit for the service of God, to whom he has consecrated himself? Therefore, in order to facilitate our salvation without expecting a miracle of grace, the holy Father judged it necessary for us to do in spirit that which will one day be done by
231 death; that is, to detach our hearts, if not ourselves, from riches and from all earthly goods, which impede our passage into that kingdom where no souls are admitted save those free from all worldly affection.

III.

The holy Father seeks for this detachment in his sons, not only that they may more easily sanctify themselves, but also that they may gain and sanctify the souls of others; for there is no more efficacious means of winning them to God than detachment from earthly possessions.

Hence he would say, *If you wish to produce fruit in souls you must leave purses alone*. He himself pursued this course in Rome; however much he might be importuned, he would never accept for himself gifts, or legacies, or property, but only the most necessary things given

¹¹ Mark x. 24.

in charity, such as the old shoes of Cardinal Alessandrino, or a small flask of wine with a little roll of bread from Cardinal Cusano, or sometimes as an alms from his spiritual children the little food which he took. By this means St Francis Xavier brought into submission to the Church many idolatrous kings and princes, many kingdoms and provinces of India and Japan, and gathered in harvests of innumerable souls, who were more readily converted by seeing a man of noble birth so poor and detached, than they were even by his preaching and miracles.

Although it is permitted to those who labour for the souls of their neighbours to receive in return some means for their support, as Christ Himself said, "The labourer is worthy of his hire;"¹² nevertheless, our 232 holy Father ordained that his subjects individually should accept no emolument, either from the faithful or from their penitents, or from any one else, in return for their labours in the Confessional, in preaching in our Church, or in visiting prisons or hospitals, the sick, or similar good works; but that all should be done in a pure, disinterested spirit, without the hope of recompense except from heaven. *Freely have you received, freely give.*¹³

Moreover, he enjoined that every priest living in the Congregation should provide himself with the necessary clothing, furniture for his room, and medicines, out of his own means, and should contribute a certain annual sum, or a certain capital to the Congregation in return for his support; so that he not only receives no payment for the services he renders to the faithful of the city in which the Congregation is erected, but he even pays to be allowed to have the honour of serving souls so precious in the sight of God. A truly singular prerogative, and one much esteemed by right-minded men, who plainly see that if a Father of the Oratory labours, he does so voluntarily and not by constraint; he does not work for reward, but even spends his own substance that he may labour for others; he toils not for this world, but solely for Heaven.

IV.

It may be asked if the priests of the Oratory of St Philip live at their 233

¹² Luke x. 7.

¹³ Matt. x. 8.

own expense, why does the Congregation seek to have an income, why does it accept from the faithful alms, offerings, and legacies? I will answer briefly for the information of those who do not understand the state of the case.

In the first place, when a Congregation is founded, there must necessarily be a house for the subjects to live in, a Church is also required in which to perform the exercises of the Institute, and, moreover, an Oratory for the brothers living in the world. If the inhabitants of the city, or some benefactors inspired by God, do not come forward to build them, how is it to be done? The subjects who come to compose the Congregation are generally strangers. If they are rich, they are often more inclined to perform pious works in their own homes; if they have but moderate or small means, they cannot be expected to do more than pay their pension; besides everyone has his own burdens.

234 In the second place, supposing that the house, the Church, and Oratory are already in existence, thanks to the munificence of the faithful or of some special benefactor, the Congregation cannot subsist on the pensions of its subjects alone; because it makes no bargains with them, and exacts from them only what they themselves offer and are in a position to contribute. All do not give as much as is necessary for their maintenance; and if the Congregation accepts one who contributes a good pension, who is already of advanced age, or of little talent, and cannot be of so much use as others, it will receive four or five with small pensions, because they are younger, more robust in health, or endowed with greater talents, and, in consequence, better fitted for the functions of the Institute. It often happens that these pensions are entirely, or in part, remitted to these subjects, on account of some unexpected need either of their own, of their families who may have become poor, and whom charity obliges them to succour.

I do not know of one Congregation (there can only be very few) in which the pensions alone are sufficient to support the subjects, or even supposing that the pensions could maintain the subjects, the Congregation would still be unable to subsist without other revenues; because, in order that the Fathers may be able to attend to the service of the Church and of souls, some lay-brothers are required—four, six, eight or ten, according to the number of the community—to fill the necessary offices of porter, sacristan, cook, housekeeper, Refectory brother, and others. These brothers pay no pensions, unless it be in the rare case

of one coming advanced in years and unable to work. They must be maintained and clothed at the expense of the Congregation, in health and in sickness; and who can keep them under fifty pounds a year each? Again, servants are sometimes needed, or an assistant for the sacristy, and they are not to be had for nothing.

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Another inevitable expense will be to repair the house and the church, and to keep them supplied with the necessary furniture. And as our churches are kept up with a certain splendour, as is well known, the candles, vestments, and decorations for feasts are no slight expense. It is true that the piety of the faithful will afford some small support to the sacristy, more or less; but, generally speaking, if the sacristy has not a special endowment, the alms alone will not suffice, because the expenses are large; and the Congregation will have to make up the difference, and this, in addition to the burden of perpetual Masses, enjoined weekly or daily by benefactors.

Finally, if the Little Oratory has no income of its own, no small expense is incurred for the Evening Oratories. There is, moreover, the visit on the last Thursday before Lent to the Seven Churches, with accompaniment of music, in order to attract people to join in it, and thus draw them away from worldly and dangerous amusements, and make them employ this time of the carnival in useful and holy diversions.

From these plain statements every sensible man will conclude that an income is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the Congregation, and that the pensions of the Fathers are only a partial assistance; and our Congregation will no longer be condemned for accepting inheritances and legacies.

In fact, our holy Father was such a lover of poverty that he refused for himself all offers of pensions, benefices, canonries, the archbishopric of Naples, the Cardinalate, and numerous legacies and inheritances; and he actually used the deeds of legacies bequeathed to him as covers for the water bottles, and he restored to life a dying person obstinately bent on making him his heir. He insisted on his sons living detached from worldly possessions, otherwise he declared they would be no true children of his. Nevertheless, when it was a question of accepting legacies and endowments for the Congregation he did not refuse them; and during his lifetime the magnificent Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella, one of the finest in Rome, was built, as was also the house where he lived with his disciples when the Congregation

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was canonically erected by a Bull of Gregory XIII., which is the same at present inhabited by the Fathers. He accepted revenues and considerable sums of money both for the Congregation and for the Little Oratory, and for the Music; and he was wont to say that, with regard to the community, "God would not fail to provide it with means; but that, having possessions, its members must be very careful not to fail in spirituality." We must remember that Christ Himself, who always lived in poverty, did not refuse the alms which were offered for the Apostolic College, and which were needed for its maintenance.

237 Therefore, the Congregations of St Philip may lawfully, nay laudably, desire to have sufficient revenues to enable them to perform with due splendour all the functions prescribed by the Institute, and to meet the daily and extraordinary expenses of the house; and when they have a sufficient income, they should refuse anything more which may be offered or given to them; and there are not wanting examples of Congregations that have done so.

At the same time, the individual members of the Congregation must love poverty, and live perfectly detached in their hearts from worldly possessions, employing what they have in alms to the poor, and other pious works. Every Congregation has given frequent and brilliant examples of this, and it may not be out of place here to quote a few of them. The celebrated Monastery for Penitent Women in Venice, which does so much good in that city, and the home for Young Girls, dedicated to the Angel Raphael, were each founded by a Father of the Oratory, as well as the Refuge where destitute girls were rescued from perilous positions and received a considerable dowry on their marriage. In Padua the two Refuges of St Catherine and St Rose, which shelter so many miserable destitute children, owe their existence to Father Malusello of the Oratory. Father Camillo Pallavicini, of the Oratory of Palermo, not content with having both founded and endowed the Congregation in his native city of Genoa, and having built a magnificent Monastery for Nuns, established out of his own funds a "Monte di Pietà" in the city of Palermo, which was the refuge and succour of all the Sicilian poor. Father Stanislas Grudoviez, of a noble family in Poland, Founder of the Congregation of Gostyn, with heroic liberality distributed the whole of his princely fortune to the poor of Christ, giving away in one day the sum of seventy thousand crowns. In Italy alone there are no less than forty pious foundations, refuges

for orphans and foundlings, hospitals, perpetual missions for the instruction of the ignorant, houses of various religious Orders, &c., due to the counsel, money, and labours of the Fathers themselves. By this means the cities which possess Congregations of the Oratory receive temporal as well as spiritual advantages,¹⁴

since the subjects who are not natives of those cities bring with them their fortunes and spend them there, to the benefit of the inhabitants; and the subjects themselves being so detached, enjoy the glorious prerogative of being poor in the midst of their own riches, thus becoming like their Father St Philip, and even like Jesus Christ Himself.

¹⁴Under this head I might mention the work done for the public welfare by the Brothers of the Little Oratory, for instance; the Hospitals of San Gallicano in Rome, and of St Philip Neri in Florence, owed their origin to two exemplary brothers of the Oratory; refuges for women were founded in Florence and Girgenti, the former by Cavaliere Gianni, and the latter by Ignazio Modica, both brothers of the Oratory; and in Bologna a Congregation for teaching Christian doctrine was established by the Venerable Cesare Bianchetti.

CHAPTER 9

THE NINTH EXCELLENCE

DETACHMENT FROM RELATIONS

Another singular Excellence practised by the priests of the Oratory is their detachment from their relations, no less than from their worldly possessions. Although they have greater liberty to visit them than cloistered religious, nevertheless they consider it a great cross if they are sometimes obliged to go to their homes; and they never do so except when compelled by necessity or charity. Experience proves to us that if we attach ourselves to our relations, our spiritual fervour decreases in proportion as our love of flesh and blood increases; and those who are so attached generally leave the Congregation of their own accord, without waiting to be expelled; and that by the just judgment of God, who is jealous of the heart which has consecrated itself to Him. 239

If the sons of St Philip ought to live detached from everything in this world, and to deprive themselves of many things that are lawful, and permitted even to observant religious, such as seeing certain curious sights, innocent in themselves, or dining at the houses of benefactors or friends (unless it be very seldom, and with the leave of the Superior); how much more ought they to live detached from all their relations, who generally enchain them with a stronger bond of affection, and bring greater distraction from the service of God? 240

Let us be persuaded, dearest fathers and brothers, that it is a great virtue and a precious Excellence of ours to keep ourselves free from every kind of business and worldly affairs, in which our relations and friends, under the false pretext of charity, would unhappily ensnare us, to the detriment of our spirituality and interior peace, to the displeasure of the Congregation, to our discredit in the eyes of the world, and often at the risk of drawing upon us the hatred of many.

It is necessary to insist very much upon this detachment, since it was the first example given us by the holy Father, who left his paternal home when a youth, and would never revisit it, nor even receive any

news of it; and we may say that this was the first foundation of his great sanctity.

Now if all the sons of St Philip are bound to study to detach themselves from their relations in the best possible manner that is consistent with justice and well-regulated and perfect charity, much more must the novices do this, who, having lately left their homes, have still fresh
241 in their minds those imaginations and memories which disappear with the passing of time.

Wherefore they must not seek to revisit their relations, and when pressed by them to do so, they must courageously refuse; but if necessity or some good reason compels them, it is a good sign when they do it with great reluctance, and with great fear and caution, after having recommended themselves from their heart to God, and after having asked not only the permission of the Superior, but also his advice, with such indifference as to be quite content whether he says yes or no. To act otherwise would be in opposition to the spirit of St Philip; and it is shown by experience that to give our affection to our relations is, at the same time, to take it away from the Congregation; and that any diminution of our affection for the Congregation exposes us to the danger of leaving it and losing our vocation, and this once lost, our eternal salvation is in danger.

I.

Father Lenzi says that the Institute of St Philip may be termed an extract of the Gospel: the more deeply you fathom the practice of those first sons of the Saint, the more numerous are the gems of exquisite virtue which you bring to the surface, surpassing the pearls fished in the Erythræan Sea. Another of our Fathers said that our Congregation is a simple house of secular priests, as regards dress and community life,
242 but, through the practice of interior virtues, it contains the virtues of a Thebaid, a Palestine, and the Collations of Cassian.

If we would learn from our first Fathers, they would teach us that even in the midst of the crowded cities wherein we dwell we may make for ourselves the hermitages of St Rose or St Teresa, as we read in a letter written by our Cardinal Tarugi from Avignon to the Fathers at Rome. This love of retirement necessarily produces that detachment from relatives which St Philip so urged upon all the members of his

Congregation, adducing the example of Saints Marcus and Marcellianus, who, after having resisted so many tortures, were on the point of denying Christ at the instance of their father and mother, had not St Sebastian strengthened them by his words. It is very difficult to find Christ among relatives; He was not discovered among His relatives and friends, as the Evangelist points out to us; upon which St Bernard remarks, "How shall I find Thee, O good Jesus, among my relatives, Thou who wert not found amongst Thine own?" And in a letter to his sister he explains this, saying, The servants of God who endeavour to gratify their relations and procure their advancement, separate themselves from the love of God. And Father Alvarez, of the Society of Jesus, used to say that a religious should be another Melchisedech, without father or mother, without relations, or any others who might deprive him of his religious liberty.

St Teresa, in the Way of Perfection, says that a nun who for her own consolation desires to see her relations, and is never weary of talking 243 to them, is not in a good state; she will never have liberty of spirit, and is not suited to her monastery. If, however, she takes it as a cross, she may see them occasionally, in order to help them in some way; but if she loves them to such a degree that their troubles distress her greatly, and that she listens with pleasure to their worldly successes, she may be certain that she will do harm to herself, without in the slightest degree benefiting them.

Ah, if we only understood the injury we do ourselves by much intercourse with relations, how we should fly from them! Our true relationship is not with flesh and blood, which profit us nothing; but with the Spirit, which in our community has formed for us brothers of the same vocation as ourselves. The less attraction we feel towards our relations, the brighter will shine in us the faith which gives us true merit, which seeks not what it hears or sees, but what it believes; which is the death within us of the human spirit, and the birth of the divine. Jesus Christ bade the Evangelists tell us who are the relations worthy of our love. When He was told that His mother and His brethren were awaiting Him outside the house where He was, He answered, Who is My mother? Who are My brethren? I recognize as mother and brethren those only who do the will of My Father. "For whosoever shall do the will of My Father, that is in heaven, he is My brother, and

sister, and mother.”¹

II.

- 244 The world does not understand this truth, and when a religious or an ecclesiastic is seen to be detached from his relations, he is thought to be devoid of every feeling of humanity and guilty of gross injustice towards them. A Father of the Congregation in which I live left his home to enter it, after having taken the advice of his confessor, and the Venerable Father Valfrè, who was known to all for his singular goodness. Hardly had he entered than the whole place was up in arms, blaming his act severely; and his relations, who formerly had loved him tenderly, showed great anger against him. He said in his defence that he had not left either a father or mother in need (for he had lost both); but only a married brother, thirty years of age, who had a patrimony suited to his condition, and sufficient intelligence to manage it well, if he would; and that he was in no way bound to act as his steward; that he took nothing from home, so as to cause no inconvenience; and that his brother would have more left after he was gone, because the benefice which he possessed, although an honourable one, was not sufficient to maintain him properly without taking part of his patrimony, which he now left to his brother untouched, although he might in good conscience have given his share of it to the poor, or to whomsoever he chose, without committing any injustice, being absolutely
245 master of it, and his brother being in no necessity.

These good reasons were not sufficient to silence the world. People said that has he remained with his brother, he might have enriched the family with his benefice; or if not with that, which was known to be a poor one, at least by his industry and advice, and the great esteem in which he was held. Thus all continued to blame him, more especially when they saw his brother's patrimony diminish, although this did not happen through any fault of his, but partly through long illnesses, and partly through his too great condescension to those with whom he dealt: God thus permitting it for his greater good, as was shown by the good and Christian death which he made (at which I was present). And although when this Father knew that his brother's property was diminishing, he assisted him in so far as he could, if not with money,

¹Matt. xii. 50.

for he had no income of any sort (the brother in the world having retained everything), at least with advice, or help procured from others at opportune times; still the gossip did not cease. The Father laughed at it, knowing the folly of the world, which never approves of what is done for God, because it wants everything for itself; and he continued to live at peace in the nest in which God in His goodness had placed him. He helped his brother, as has been said, from afar, because he seldom went to his house, and usually only for a visit of one day or two and not more, as charity appeared to dictate, and according to the advice of his Superior; and the brother sensibly felt the protection of God, who made his only daughter a nun, and provide the only son with a canonry in his own country. This is how the world treats priests, 246 who separate themselves from their family in order to serve God, and to attend to the obligations of their state.

Those, however, are perhaps worse treated who, from overwhelming attachment to their relations, mix themselves up in the affairs of their family to such a degree that they neglect their own obligations in order to enrich it. God often allows the very things which are the subjects of the care and attention of priests to come to nought, instead of prospering, especially when the revenues of ecclesiastical benefices are spent upon them. Moreover, as the world thinks that priests are under the indispensable obligation of assisting their relations, the latter burden them with all the laborious and intricate affairs of their family; and so long as things turn out well, and they are able to work for them, they seem satisfied; when they can do no more, they thank them only by saying that they have done their duty. But if unluckily they should fail, they are called usurpers and traitors to their families. If they give them their all in life and in death, they do no more than their duty. If in their lifetime they give their families little of their fortune, they are ungrateful for the kind treatment they have always received, for the respect that has always been shown them; and hence often arise quarrels, dissensions, and ill-will. If at their death they do not leave their whole fortune to their relations, but bequeath rich legacies to churches or hospitals, perhaps to unburden their consciences; 247 they have been perfidious and unjust, without charity or compassion.

Such is the reward which the world generally bestows on ecclesiastics too much attached to their relations; and a still more cruel recompense is the entire oblivion which is the lot of these poor priests,

whose family will not have a single Mass said in suffrage for their souls. A learned and pious parish priest of my acquaintance one day put the following question in a very numerous assembly of ecclesiastics:—Whether any one of them had by chance ever received an alms from a relation of a deceased priest to say Mass for his soul (not meaning, of course, the Masses ordered in the will, but spontaneous ones)? All frankly answered, “No;” and he himself, being eighty years of age, asserted that he had never received one. I, who am nearly sixty, can say the same; and I have several times in conferences of priests asked the same question, and always received the same answer. All said they had received alms for Masses from a father for his son, from a son for his father, from a husband for his wife, from a wife for her husband, but never for the soul of a deceased priest.

Heirs make a difficulty about having those Masses said which are expressly ordered in the will; is it likely, then, that they will have any said of their own accord, and without any other obligation than that of gratitude and charity? The laity have the idea that priests will have said many for themselves in their own lifetime, or if they have not
 248 done so, the fault is their own; and this is all their reward.

Open, then, your eyes, O priests, and let the experience of that which has befallen others make you cautious; provide in time for yourselves, and do not flatter yourselves that you will be aided by your relatives. They will enjoy the fruit of all your labour for their temporal advantage; and you will burn for a long time in the fire of purgatory, and God grant that nothing worse may happen to you for your excessive attachment to your relations.

III.

One of the maxims of the world is, that a priest is meant, not only to shine in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, vested in fine linen, or in rich parishes, in canons' stalls, in honourable benefices, with large revenues; but also to contribute to the honour of his family by sustaining and enriching it. All this is the very opposite of the will of God and the mind of the Church; since God desires that the priest should be entirely for His service, and not for that of his relations; He provides him with revenues to succour the poor and adorn the altars of the Church, and not to squander in profane uses. But the world, as I have already said, does not understand this truth; and it appears that it was not

understood even by the most admirable family that ever lived on this earth, the family of Jesus Christ, as St Luke explains to us: "And they understood not the word that He spoke unto them."²

Let the world think what it will, if we wish to make sure of saving 249
our souls we must keep the promise made to God when we received holy orders: "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance,"³ and the resolution made when we entered the Congregation—to serve God and souls, and not the world or our relations. If these are poor, we may let them enjoy our revenues, in part, or in entirety, according to our necessity and theirs; for, as St Bernard says, they may well be the object of our charity and liberality, and they ought even to be preferred to others. If they are in comfortable circumstances, why give them money to spend in feasting, vanity, and folly? "Be content," wrote our Cardinal Tarugi to his brother, "with an honest mediocrity; endow your children with virtue: if poor, they will be virtuous, if rich, they will be vicious." Our Rule orders us to spend all our superfluity, not in profane uses, or in aggrandizing relations who are not in want, but on good objects. If we do not observe our Rule, but assist our relations in all their affairs, from the too great love we bear them, we shall easily lose our vocation; for what time will remain to us in which to do good and fulfil our obligations? Alas, how many have left the Congregation from too much tenderness towards their relations! They have taken upon themselves some cure of souls, some chaplaincy or other employment, and under the colour of charity, or some other feeble pretext, they have made themselves the agents of their families. It little matters to the latter that we lose our vocation, so long as they 250
gain their object. If without failing in the duties of our state, we can help them in some urgent affair, with advice, recommendation, or a necessary journey, which is not prejudicial to our souls, let us do it; this is not forbidden. If charity often obliges us to do these things for others, it is only reasonable that we should also do them for our relations. But when they interfere with our vocation, which is the will of God signified to us, let us answer them as Christ answered St Peter: "Go behind me, satan; thou art a scandal unto Me, because thou savourest not the things that are of God, but the things that are

²Luke ii. 50.

³Ps. xv. 5.

of men.”⁴

When we shall have lost our vocation, and the love of our duties, what will compensate us for this loss? The goodwill of our family? To please them, must we displease God? Whosoever acts thus “savours not the things of God, but the things that are of men.”

And even if an Angel were to come down from Heaven to persuade us to forsake our vocation: “Believe him not;” for he could not be a good Angel, nor the Spirit of God, but of flesh and blood, who reveals not the things of God. Oh, how many have been deceived under the precept of charity! I know a good ecclesiastic who, about the age of forty, entered one of our Congregations in Piedmont; at the close of his noviciate his brother died, leaving many young children, and he was advised to return home to assist them. This advice was not, however, given by the Fathers of the Congregation, but by others who, although
251 learned and prudent, were not acquainted with our Institute; and may have thought, perhaps, that a subject might leave the Congregation at his own pleasure without the slightest fault, not looking on it as a vocation, but simply as a work of supererogation. Their object was a good one, so far as regarded charity towards those orphans; but they did not reflect that their mother was still living, who, being a woman of good sense, was better able to assist them than the novice in question. He returned home, however, and took in hand the management of the house; but although he gave himself up entirely to it, and moreover undertook an employment which brought him in about eighty crowns a year, yet, as he was little versed in worldly affairs, the family began to decline, and after his death they were all reduced to poverty.

How different was the conduct of Father Giuseppe Varda of our Congregation, who might well be called the father of it, for he entered it when it was newly founded in this city, trained it in spirituality and governed it as Provost with remarkable prudence for many years, passing afterwards to a better life with a reputation for singular holiness and perfection. On the death of his brother he was vehemently urged to return home to take charge of his nephews, who were still very young. But, faithful to his vocation, he trusted entirely in God, and resolutely declined; and the family did not on that account suffer loss of anything necessary to its position.

252 I do not believe that the devil has any stronger weapon with which

⁴Matt. xvi. 23.

to strike down a son of St Philip than affection for relations. This is the subtle artifice which he employs to destroy our vocation, as he was wont to do with the ancient monks who, not being bound by vows, were free to return to the world. With cloistered religious this artifice does not succeed so well, because after their profession they cannot leave their Order without becoming apostates; and if even in their convents they mix themselves up too much in the affairs of their families, their Superiors have power to send them to another convent.

But this temptation may far more easily insinuate itself into us, who are free and able to leave the Congregation when we choose; therefore we must stand well on our guard lest the evil spirit deceive us. We must on no account prefer a finite, variable, and inconstant good to God, who is infinite goodness. "If thou art dead with Christ to thy relations according to the flesh," says St Basil, "go not away from thy own place, lest at the same time thou shouldst abandon thy good life."

Father Consolini lived so detached from his relations, that, from the moment he was received into the Congregation he would never revisit his native place, nor did he ever allow himself to be moved by the anxious and repeated entreaties of his mother, who desired to see him once more. He highly praised those who, being called by God to the spiritual life, keep themselves apart from their relations; and he used to say that this virtue was little understood by many religious. He said to one, who asked him for some advice towards his progress 253 in virtue, *My son, keep aloof from your relations, if you wish to attend to spiritual things and to live in peace.*

Father Nicolò Gigli, a Frenchman by birth, and also one of the first disciples of St Philip, was so detached from all affection for his relations, that he never thought of them; and when he received letters from them, he used to throw them into the fire without even deigning to read them. This manner of dealing with our relations is not only necessary for our tranquillity, Father Lenzi tells us, but is also a sign of the love we bear to God, because the better to please Him we break through so natural a bond; and without this sacrifice our service is little pleasing to God. He adduces a proof of this which is of faith, written in Deuteronomy for the tribe of Levi, the shadow and figure of our sacerdotal Order: "Who hath said to his father and to his mother, I do not know you; and to his brethren, I know you not; and their

own children they have not known. These have kept thy word, and observed thy covenant, thy judgments, O Jacob, and thy law, O Israel: they shall pour incense in thy wrath, and holocaust upon thy altar."⁵

These words were spoken by Moses in his last testament, when near his death, and he imprinted them on the heart of the tribe of Levi. A grave author (Peter of Blois) remarks upon this, that God did not admit those to His service in the sacrifices who had not made
254 similar demonstrations towards their relations: For the Lord said to Moses, Neither priest nor Levite shall serve Me, unless he hath first said to his father or mother, I know thee not.

I would that the same words were graven on the hearts of all the priests and lay-brothers of the Oratory; so that, setting aside every attachment towards their relations, they might remain firm in their vocation. He who considers what a vocation is, trembles at the very thought of losing it; for it is the universal opinion of the Fathers of the Church, that those who by their own fault lose their vocation lose almost every hope of salvation.

I therefore say that this is a great Excellence granted by God to our Congregation; because the true sons of St Philip, being very detached from their relations, are not easily drawn away by their seductions, and thus render themselves worthy of the gift of perseverance.

IV.

It is, however, not only the flatteries or simple entreaties of his relations which induce a subject to leave the Congregation in order to help them, but it is often that he fears the gossip of the world; and this is generally set on foot by the relations themselves. There are always to be found men of some position, men of the world, who "savour not the things that are of God." These will say to him that his vocation is a beautiful one, and his state most enviable; but that charity is still more beautiful; that the world does not approve, nay, that it often censures,
255 his retirement, although in itself good and holy, since it is prejudicial to his family; that by returning to his home or his estate he might do great temporal good to his family, without neglecting his own spiritual good, or that of others, there being no want of means and methods of working out our salvation in the midst of the world, as indeed many

⁵Deut. xxxiii. 9.

ecclesiastics do. We let ourselves be caught in such snares, persuading or flattering ourselves that this is the Will of God, because men of great weight speak thus. We do not reflect that a vocation which is the Will of God signified to us, cannot be judged by the maxims of the world, because God, who is absolute master of all things and all men, when He wills to call anyone to His service, even with temporal loss to his relations, does no wrong to any one; just as He does no wrong when by death He takes away the head of a family, who is most necessary to it, since without him the children will be reduced to poverty.

I wish, moreover, to expose a delusion to which the subject who is thus tempted is liable. He thinks that the world will accuse him of want of charity, if he does not leave the Congregation to render assistance to his relations; and, worked upon by this fear, he readily forsakes it; but I can tell him that, generally speaking, the world will condemn him if he does go. The friends of the family and the members of it, for some private interest of their own, may speak thus; but sensible and enlightened men judge differently, and they condemn, at least, for his inconsistency, that father or brother who abandoned his vocation under whatever pretext; and when they see one, either within or without the Congregation, over affectionate towards his relations, they conceive no great opinion of him, knowing that a religious who wishes to be one not merely in name but in deed, must lead a life of entire detachment from all things of this world. 256

Abraham, passing through Hebron, begged the rulers of that country to grant him a fitting place in which to bury his wife Sara. "I am a stranger and sojourner among you: give me the right of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead. The children of Heth answered, saying, Thou art a prince of God among us,"⁶ or, as the Septuagint has it, "Thou art a king from God over us." Thou art our prince, our king, come from heaven, sent by God; we can refuse thee nothing. What were the insignia of a prince which they saw in him? He had entered their city in the guise of a poor pilgrim. "I am a stranger and sojourner among you." He had not made his entry in a mantle of light, nor with gold, precious gems, or magnificent guards and equipages; but as a humble suppliant: "Give me the right of a burying-place among you." By what, then, were they impelled to say, "Thou art a king from God," and immediately to grant his

⁶Gen. xxiii. 4-6.

request? You ask by what? By seeing him so composed in mind, so thoroughly master of his affections. His wife is dead—they say among
 257 themselves—and not a tear, nor a sigh, nor one word of grief. This is indeed no ordinary man, made of flesh and blood, filled with earthly affections; he is a man from another world, superior in virtue and dignity to us all. When they witnessed not the tears and lamentations usual at funerals, suddenly struck by the excellence of so great virtue, they broke forth into these words, “Thou art a king from God over us.” Thus writes Philo-Judæus.

There can be no doubt that the priest is the great prince of the kingdom of Christ. “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood.”⁷ But how are you to make yourself known as such? by the splendour of your person, your garments, or your residence? These are all smoke, mere shadows of worldly vanity. Shall it be by the magnificence of your vestments, of your lace, your linen, or your exalted dignity? This is not sufficient; it must be by dominion over your passions, by complete control over your affection towards your relations, that men, seeing you so detached, may exclaim, “Thou art a king from God over us!”

God exacts this of us with such rigour, that in Leviticus He declared that priest to be stained and contaminated who, at the death of his own parents, showed his sorrow by any outward sign, or who was present at their funeral. “Nor shall he go in at all to any dead person; not even for his father, nor his mother, shall he be defiled.”⁸

The law seems severe, but, upon reflection, we see it to be just and merciful; for in a priest consecrated to God, and raised by holy
 258 prayer to the very confines of the Divinity, a superhuman disposition is required, that is, a total separation from flesh and blood. “For the law demands,” says Philo-Judæus, “in that man a disposition noble above other men; since he is consecrated to God, he must renounce all affection for his relations.”

V.

I will conclude this chapter by an appeal to secular persons, to implore them, by the love of Jesus Christ, not to tempt their sons, brothers, or relations, either directly or indirectly, to leave the Congregation, and

⁷ 1 Peter ii. 9.

⁸ Lev. xxi. 11.

thus make them lose their vocation under pretext of some need, in which they may stand of their assistance.

The devil makes use of this pretext for their perdition, and for yours also. If it be a grave sin to deter a relation, or indeed any one, from entering a religious Order or Congregation, to which he feels himself called; it must surely be a far graver sin to take him out of it after he has once entered. I well know that there some cases which oblige a religious to leave his monastery; for instance, if his father or mother were in extreme or most grave necessity, and without their son's assistance, having no other support, might be in danger of death. In such a case theologians consider it not merely lawful, but even a duty, by virtue of the natural law. But for a brother I find no such law, excepting only extreme necessity; and in such cases the Congregation would give leave, *ad tempus*; that is, the subject might depart and live away from the Congregation as long as the necessity lasted, and no longer; and then return to his nest. This has been practised in our Congregation, which gave leave to a subject to assist his father, who was alone, crippled with gout, and unable to support himself upon the little he possessed. The son remained about eight years with him, and by his industry provided him with sufficient for his sustenance and for attendance in his infirmities; and then he returned to the Congregation, to his own great consolation and also that of his father, who is still alive. 259

But these are exceptional cases. In general, people seek to draw out of the Congregation their sons and relations for their own temporal advantage; they endeavour to procure for them a parish, or the post of confessor to nuns, or other benefices and employments which bring an income, in order that they may have at least part of the revenues, not for their necessary subsistence, or to be relieved from hunger, but to enrich the family; without reflecting "that ecclesiastical revenues in secular families are," according to the saying of Father Tarugi, which is confirmed by experience, "like fire which consumes them both within and without." Who has ever said of this that it was lawful? How many chastisements of it have been seen? How many fathers and brothers have bitterly regretted having caused their sons and brothers to have left the Congregation, because they have been grievously disappointed in their hopes? They have seen them live no longer like ecclesiastics, but like spend-thrifts; and, instead of receiving from them the help 260

they looked for, have seen them become the ruin of the family. What, then, must we say of the soul who so easily gives up his vocation, and of him who is the cause of this loss?

Some do not indeed desire their sons and brothers should leave the Congregation to help them; but they expect them to take charge of their temporal affairs, their estates, their business, their lawsuit, as if they were laymen like themselves. But this is also unlawful. If priests who dwell in the house of their father or brother should not mix themselves up in their affairs, lest it prevent their attending to the obligations of the ecclesiastical state, except in things permitted, and which do not impede their duty, how much less should those take part in worldly affairs who are consecrated to God in a Congregation which employs all its subjects in so many occupations for the acquisition of their own perfection, and in offices which they are to exercise for the good of the Congregation and their neighbours? The holy Father absolutely willed that his sons should be men of prayer, and hence they are called Fathers of the Oratory. But since he wished them to be also occupied in the service of souls, he prescribed for them no determined time for prayer, excepting in the evening; but that, if they cannot make it in the morning, they must take some more fitting time and not omit it; and thus fulfil both the one and the other, praying and labouring for the good of souls. Taking this for granted, how can seculars with a clear conscience attempt to employ them in their temporal affairs, when this would draw them away from prayer and from their necessary duties, and thus render them inobservant of their Rules? If, as I have already said, it were a question of helping their relations with advice, or with a letter, or some other trifling attention, which does not involve any engagement or great inconvenience, we may do so; and especially may we assist them in matters pertaining to their salvation, or in sickness and at the hour of death. But in no way can we approve the exaction from the fathers of frequent application to family interests, which is prejudicial to the Institute, which impedes the fulfilment of their offices and obligations, and their spiritual profit. Ah! leave them in peace; they will help you more by their prayers before God than by all the personal assistance they might render you. And in the meantime let us praise and thank God that the true sons of St Philip know how to free themselves from the importunate requests of their relations. If they are poor, and have nothing of their own to give

them, they will procure them alms; and it is a good and prudent rule to cause these alms to pass to them through other hands, so that they may not presume upon it. If they are rich, they leave them in their own state, and rest quite satisfied with hearing that they live as good Christians, without desiring or endeavouring to enrich them. I therefore affirm that this detachment from relations is an Excellence given by God to our Congregation, and we must beg Him without ceasing to preserve it for His greater glory and our own spiritual advantage.

CHAPTER 10

THE TENTH EXCELLENCE

CHASTITY

As our holy Father always preserved unstained the fair lily of purity in the midst of Rome, among many temptations and occasions of great peril, so may it be said that he has obtained this privilege for his sons, that the virtue of chastity should shine forth in them in a special manner; and that having to treat with persons of the world, and sometimes even the most depraved, they should not suffer from it, and that seeing innumerable stains they should not be defiled. 262

Not that the priests and brothers of the Congregation are impeccable in this respect, since they too are men; but we must thank God, that through His great mercy we do not hear of scandals regarding them on this point; and God will grant, that when a subject has inclinations contrary to so beautiful a virtue, he will return to his own home, where he can take that liberty which the Congregation would never allow him, in order to preserve for itself unspotted this beautiful Excellence, having regard principally to the most holy Virgin Mary, 263 who was the foundress of the Congregation, as St Philip often declared, and also to St Philip, who remained a virgin to his death.

This Excellence, however, should not give any among us reason to be puffed up, or to expose ourselves capriciously to danger. On the contrary, it is necessary on our part to guard such a treasure with humble fear of our own weakness, flying every occasion whatever of stumbling, and considering our own nothingness, always to tremble for our own selves without taking scandal at the falls of others. Moreover, each one of us must keep strict watch over himself, lest spiritual love overpass its limits and change itself into carnal love, as good wine turns into vinegar. It is because the Congregation trusts that its subjects will take the necessary precautions that it allows them to go out alone without companions, except during their noviciate, in the full belief and confidence that even outside their own walls those who have

been called by God will keep themselves from danger and remain in safety. If they be not called by God to the Congregation, and wish for more liberty, let them leave it as soon as possible, lest through delay their departure might prove more pernicious. This permission must not, however, be granted them blindly; but Superiors and others on whom devolves the duty of watching over them, must use great diligence, caution, and care, in addition to the internal watchfulness, 264 which is ever renewed by means of continual prayer, spiritual reading, and the conferences and discourses which take place once a fortnight in the Congregation of faults.

I.

In order that we may have a proper esteem of this precious virtue of purity, which is such a distinctive Excellence of our Congregation, I will quote a part of the last chapter of the manuscript of Father Lenzi, as I could not find more fitting words in which to describe what it is, and how we should possess it. He writes as follows:—"This is the virtue which colours the face and image of the Congregation of the Oratory, and of every religious community, and which says to all without words, *He that seeth Me, seeth the Father also*.¹

"But every one who, in word, deed, gesture, or intention, is negligent in combating the enemy, obscures this beautiful image; and, on the other hand, although it be true that every man is human, nevertheless the grace of a well-guarded vocation makes him resemble God. St Philip is depicted with the lily of virginity between him and the Blessed Virgin, to show us that purity is preserved especially by devotion to the Madonna, towards whom he had such a tender love that he called her his *dear Mamma*, "*Mamma mia*." The life of our Saint teaches us that he does not content himself with a purity in his sons which simply flies from sin, he wills it to be so vigorous that it should not be satisfied with the *Depart from evil*, but should proceed to the 265 next degree, *Do good*, desiring it to be so meritorious in us as to be almost miraculous. And indeed nothing short of this is required for the exercises of our vocation and for the guidance of the souls who have recourse to us. This is a most delicate, jealous, and dangerous matter;

¹ John xiv. 9.

and if we lose ever so little of our love for it, we instantly lose our love for the integrity of our Congregation.

“May God grant us to see the importance of this matter; because our negligence usually proceeds, for the most part, from our not understanding the beauty and importance of purity, and that the greater the frailty the more need of caution. Our Saviour said, ‘All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given,’² because it is truly a great grace; and He ends His discourse thus: ‘He that can take, let him take it.’

“If we persevere in the Congregation of St Philip, we have found a Paradise. Now, if we are in Paradise, let us remember what our Lord said: ‘They shall be as the Angels of God in Heaven.’³ St Francis of Sales says that chastity is a virtue most pleasing to God and the Angels, God having willed that it should be eternally observed in Heaven, where there is no sort of marriage. Will it not make you most happy (he writes to one of his daughters) to begin in this world the life which you will continue eternally in the next? And in another place, quoting the words of St Paul, ‘Follow peace with all men, and holiness,’⁴ he says that by this is understood chastity, as St Jerome and St John Chrysostom have it, ‘without which no one shall see God.’ The same 266 Saint, giving advice to Philothea, says that our bodies are like glasses, which cannot be carried touching one another without danger of their breaking; or like fruits which, by touching one another, lose much of their beauty, smell, and taste, and then decay. For this reason our Rule reminds all, and particularly the novices, not to touch one another, not even in joke. And the words of the Apostle fit in well here: ‘We have this treasure in earthen vessels.’⁵ Although chastity springs from the heart as its origin, it nevertheless concerns the body as its matter. Hence it is that it may be lost through all the exterior senses of the body, as well as through the thoughts of the mind and the desires of the heart; and it is contrary to chastity not only to speak, but to look at, listen to, touch or smell impure things, if the heart dwells upon them and takes some voluntary pleasure in them, even though it be for a single moment. The Sacred Spouse of the Canticles has her

² Matt. xix. 11, 12.

³ Matt. xxii. 30.

⁴ Heb. xii. 14.

⁵ 2 Cor. iv. 7.

hands distilling myrrh, the preservative against corruption; her lips are bound with a red fillet, a sign of the purity of her words; she has the eyes of a dove; her ears bear gold pendants, the proper insignia of purity of sight and hearing; her smell is like the cedars of Libanus, an incorruptible wood."

II.

267 If you wish for examples of so beautiful a virtue, I cannot show you a more appropriate one than that of our holy Father himself, whom we should strive with the utmost care to imitate. In his beatification the Sacred Congregation of Rites declared that it was sufficiently proved that he had lived and died a virgin. His purity so shone forth in his countenance that many could not fix their eyes upon him, and he appeared a very angel of Paradise. His eyes were so full of vivacity, and so bright even in his extreme old age, that no painter, with all his efforts, could ever represent them. His hands shone like gold and like the sun. His body exhaled the sweetest perfume, as do his relics to this day, and even the rooms in which his things are preserved. He knew by their bad smell the impurity of others, and he was often obliged to close his nostrils to avoid smelling the intolerable odour.

His purity was so perfect that he could say that in this respect his body was like a statue which has no feeling. By the great merit of this his purity very many were liberated from temptations of the senses, some by touching things of his, others by his laying hands upon their heads, or by being pressed to his breast, or by simply invoking him or frequenting his society.

268 You must not, however, imagine that his insensibility on this point was natural to him; on the contrary, he acquired it in so high a degree by the strict custody which he maintained over his senses, and by vigorously combating his temptations, which were neither few nor light. He was assailed by day and by night in a covert and in an open manner; many and many a time by dissolute women, and even by devils who appeared to him in the shape of naked figures; but he always vanquished them either by prayer or by flight. And because he was extremely desirous that all should overcome the like temptations, he gave the following advice, which we gather from his Life, and especially from Book ii. chap. 13:—

“To fly bad companions and all dangerous occasions; not to nourish our bodies delicately; to avoid idleness; to pray much; to frequent the Sacraments, and particularly Confession; to reveal all our thoughts and temptations openly to our confessor, and to keep nothing concealed from him; never to trust in ourselves because of any experience, length of time, old age, or infirmity; to have recourse to the Blessed Virgin, particularly with the ejaculation: Virgin and Mother: Mother and Virgin.”

I wish to reduce these holy remedies for the preservation of purity to three only, as being the principal ones, without, however, excluding the others. The first is to fly from all occasions. And in very truth he who hangs from a lofty tower, suspended by a thread, is not in so great danger as is the purity of man among the occasions of losing it. The holy Father was wont to say that when a man puts himself in the occasion saying, I shall not fall, it is a manifest sign that he will fall with greater injury to his soul; and St Bernard went so far as to say that not 269 to fall in dangerous occasions was a greater miracle than to raise the dead. This is indeed the case. We are sons of Adam in a state of fallen nature, and this suffices. We are already weakened through original sin, our reason is obscured, our heart full of malice, inclining to evil; concupiscence leaves us no rest. We are compounded of sulphur, our senses rebellious, the match smoking, all our passions on fire; if to all this we add the occasion, how shall we succeed in standing firm?

The surest escape lies in flight, and hence St Philip used to say, *In the war of the senses cowards are the victors*—that is to say, those who fly. And even if we have been in occasions of sin without experiencing any temptation, we ought still to fear lest the devil should have wished thus to lull us into a false security. He arranges that we shall not fall several times in the same occasions, because he awaits a more fitting time, in which certain circumstances may render the fall more headlong and more irreparable.

Thus St Cyprian called that hope, with which we trust to keep ourselves safe amongst the incentives and occasions of sin, foolish, uncertain, and deceitful. “It is a fallacious hope, which hopes to be saved amidst the occasions of sin.” This would be the same as saying, I will live in the danger of losing my soul. It would be like a man who lays himself down to sleep on the edge of a river; if in his sleep he should happen to turn over on the side of the river, he would precipitate him-

270 self into it to his own destruction.

The second most efficacious and, it may be said, secure remedy against impure thoughts is to drive them away with all possible speed.

In general, people do not begin to sin by deed, but by thought. The Evangelist St John says that the devil entered into Judas. But he began by insinuating bad thoughts, suggestions of hatred, of complacency in his gain. *Cum immisisset in cor ejus diabolus ut traderet eum* [when the devil had put it into his heart to betray Him]. The Jews began by killing our Saviour in thought, *Cogitaverunt ut interficerent eum* [they thought that they might kill Him]. And after thoughts, they came to deeds.

The mind of man is a battlefield, where thoughts pass frequently in review, and fight one against another; good thoughts against evil, evil against good. It is a great happiness if the good thoughts come off the victors, but a great misfortune if the evil thoughts triumph.

Man must suffer this warfare within himself. The truth, however, is that it lies in his own power to make whom he wills conquer, and on that side towards which he inclines will be the victory. He is indeed miserable if he allows the evil thought to conquer, because this wicked thought is afterwards the cause of his sins. If a man accepts at once a good thought, and entertains it in such a way that his will feeds on it, he may have good hopes of his salvation; but if he does not promptly resist an evil thought in its beginning, if he voluntarily entertains it even for a single moment, he is in great danger of damnation. "How
271 long shall hurtful thoughts abide in thee?"⁶ Thus did God complain of His people of Israel by the mouth of the prophet Jeremias. But mark, He did not say, how long shall they lodge? but, how long shall they abide? Because there is no fault in evil thoughts passing through our minds, and lodging in us, like pilgrims, as if passing upon a journey; for who can help their assailing us? But the harm lies in entertaining them and making them dwellers in the house.

How easy it is for these evil thoughts to enter in and dwell in a heart which is unwary! And if they enter in and succeed in establishing themselves, what ruin to the soul! Little thieves enter a house by a small hole, and then open the door to the big ones, that they may get in to rob and kill, and do what they will. In the same way little bad thoughts enter at first and open the door to consent, so that death may

⁶Jer. iv. 14.

have entrance into the soul; they furtively cast in the poison, the will seeks it with delectation; and behold, the soul is dead in sin.

How many sins are committed in the world by thought! Who can number them? This comes of the want of promptitude in driving them away; and what is still worse is, that some even make no account of them, considering them only scruples, and do not confess them, as if they were not sins. I grant, that if evil impure thoughts have made no breach in our heart, have not been welcomed by us, nor received, they are in no way sinful, indeed we merit by abhorring them and rejecting them. But if we have voluntarily admitted them, after 272 having recognized them as evil; if there has been any complacency or delectation in even some momentary stay to which we have given some consent, without doubt they are sins, and sins worthy of chastisement, just as much as if they were sins of deed or of omission. And, in fact, God did punish them with the universal deluge. The sacred text in Genesis is clear, and needs no interpretation. "God seeing that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that all the thought of their heart was bent upon evil at all time, it repented Him that He had made man upon the earth... He said: I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth."⁷ And He would have done so, had not Noe, who was dear to Him, induced Him to mitigate the punishment. But to show the intense hatred which He bears to bad thoughts (which embrace in substance the malice of evil deeds), and particularly to those of impurity, such as were those of that time, for "all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth," God drowned the world beneath the flood and destroyed the whole human race, with the exception of the single family of the innocent Noe. Ah! how dare we, then, say that thoughts are not sins, and sins most hateful to God?

How horrible are bad thoughts on account of their malice! They are incorrigible by nature, and are, as it were, immortal. They are horrible for their malice, because they are the sins of Angels, and therefore 273 the more difficult to be pardoned. If God did not pardon a single bad thought in the Angels, who were to a certain extent to be pitied, because they had not yet seen any example of punishments; will there not be difficulty in obtaining pardon, not for one thought alone, but for our multitude of evil thoughts, after we have already seen so many dreadful chastisements following them? They are, moreover, incorri-

⁷Gen. vi. 5.

gible in their nature, because they are hidden and concealed within us. For how can they be corrected, if they are not visible, nor known to others? Lastly, they are, as it were, immortal, because if one dies it is instantly succeeded by another, and therefore the best and most necessary remedy is to stifle them at their birth, to kill them with all speed; otherwise one will beget another, and they will become infinite in number. This is the very remedy which Fra Leone, one of the companions of St Francis of Assisi, suggested in a conference on the subject. One proposed one remedy, another another, by way of defence against evil thoughts contrary to chastity. But Fra Leone, while approving them all, said frankly that his own was without doubt the best. He said: "When some evil thought assails me, I immediately shut the door of my heart; if it returns to the charge, I instantly shut it again." And he added: "If a dog were to come to your door to bite you, you would not be slow in shutting it; if you opened it, and saw the dog again about to spring at you, would you not shut the door quicker than before? Do the same with evil thoughts. Drive them away with all possible speed and you will always come off victorious. If you are the least negligent they are so insinuating and attractive, and penetrate so easily, that they will have stained you almost before you perceive them." This remedy has worked wonders in many, as I have seen and do see continually by experience, and it will certainly do wonders for you. But do not forget to practise it.

There now remains the last and most powerful remedy, namely, humility. He who is humble, is diffident, and mistrusts himself. As he fears to fall into the snares which the world is continually laying for purity, he will not risk remaining, even for a moment, in the occasions of sin; but he takes every precaution to avoid all danger, and adopts every means best calculated to establish himself firmly in this virtue. On the contrary, he who is not humble, but proud and self-confident, neglects the custody of his senses, throws himself boldly and rashly into all occasions without reflection, takes no measures to avoid danger, and easily falls; thus it is the general opinion of the holy Fathers, and especially of the angelic St Thomas, and it is attested by experience, that God ordinarily punishes the proud by allowing them to lose their chastity. "He who remains in danger, and is not conscious of it, falls into sins of the flesh which are manifestly of themselves disgraceful; so that, having been humbled by this fall, he may rise by reason

of the shame he feels.” And as there is no sin which so degrades the soul as does the foul sin of the senses, which changes it from being rational and spiritual and like unto the Angels, into being, as it were entirely animal, carnal, like to the foolish brutes “in whom there is no understanding;”⁸ we may well say that this pride must have been great indeed to have been followed by so immense and so abominable a humiliation. 275

He who possesses humility possesses also the fear of God; and this fear is a guardian Angel, very powerful to defend him from sin. It is founded on these reflections with regard to God, himself, and others. With regard to God, if to his misfortune he has already sinned against purity, he fears lest he should be condemned to eternal fire, for although God is good He is also just. If He sometimes forgives the first, second, or third sin, He may not, perhaps, forgive the fourth. If He pardons some fall through frailty, He will not pardon obstinacy in that sin, nor an inveterate habit of it; or granting again, that God is ready at any time to forgive even a long contracted habit of gross sins, supposing that this habit be given up, and proportionate penance be performed in due season, he fears, nevertheless, that this may not be the case with him. He knows not whether his sorrow has been sufficient, or his purpose of amendment sufficiently efficacious, or whether his confession was completely sincere; this makes him fear, and thus fearing, it is easy for him to abstain from falling again.

With regard to himself, he fears because he knows there is nothing 276 between himself and sin; that a thought, a complacency, a consent, suffices for his ruin. If he has never yet fallen into the vice contrary to chastity, he may still fall through his frailty; and if he has fallen, he may the more easily fall again through the same frailty. A reed was placed in the hand of Christ, to give Him the appearance of a mock king; and this was a mystery, in order that He, in sight of the image of our frailty, might take compassion on it. We are frail reeds, and shall we not fear? Experience has indeed taught us to do so. We know how things have hitherto gone with us. But even if we have been so happy as to have preserved our purity hitherto, and have already attained great perfection in that virtue, we are no less frail on that account, or less liable to sin; only if we fall our fall would be the more terrible and more fatal, because we should be precipitated from a greater height. It

⁸Ps. xxxi. 9.

is like a man ascending a mountain, the higher he climbs the farther he goes from the precipice or place of fall; but if he fell his wounds would be deeper and more serious, and he would the more easily lose his life.

277 With regard, lastly, to others. He who is humble, fears, and does not dare to boast like the proud, who say, "I shall not fall;" because he knows that so many pillars of sanctity have fallen, and so many men have been plunged into this shameful vice who have remained virgins up to their decrepit old age; so many hermits consumed by penance for forty or fifty years; so many champions who, to sustain the Catholic faith, had already undergone the most cruel torments and painful imprisonments, whose bodies had even been half roasted by the fire; and they all fell through the want of humility.

The man who is humble fears, also, because he reflects on those Saints who have never fallen, but who preserved themselves by cautious fear because they were humble. St John the Baptist, who was sanctified in his mother's womb, was full of fear; and through fear lest the world might tarnish in some degree the candour of his innocence and purity, retired into the desert at the age of three. And we, fragile reeds, full of so many of the worst inclinations, perhaps already accustomed to so many falls and relapses, with such experience of ourselves, we who have confessed a hundred times the same sins, without any amendment, nay, even with repetition and multiplication of them day by day, shall we not fear? If this fear be wanting, it is an evident sign that humility is wanting; and if humility be wanting we shall be sure to fall, because this is the ordinary punishment of pride.

The humble man, through fear of falling, is prompt to combat the impure thoughts which assail him, and is all attention to avoid every dangerous occasion; and with these three remedies, of combat, flight, and fear, it is easy to acquire and to preserve in ourselves the virtue of chastity.

III.

278 The advice and remedies which I have hitherto suggested for the preservation of our purity intact, are adapted to those of every state or profession, whether religious or lay; but they must be practised in a special manner by priests of the Oratory, on account of the distinguished Excellence which the Congregation possesses in the virtue of

chastity. The Congregation does indeed, by a special grace of God, continue to preserve this Excellence in great vigour, and this especially for two reasons. The first is, that when the Congregation sees a subjects stained with the vice opposed to this beautiful virtue of chastity, even though the stain be in no way grievous, it will at once dismiss him, and will not wait for the second or other graver fall; not only because it is a stain abhorred by God and by our holy Father, and which would deeply disgrace the good name of the Congregation, but also because, when they have once passed the three years' noviciate, its subjects have the liberty of going out alone, without a companion, and they would thus be in too great danger of being defiled by that horrible pitch, if they had the slightest inclination thereto, and the Congregation could not tolerate their being exposed to such a danger.

The second reason is, that of a subject had any inclination to too great freedom, as he is always at liberty to leave the Congregation, and knows that it uses the utmost diligence and caution in this respect, and is most attentive in investigating the sayings and doings of each one, he readily avails himself of this liberty to depart, in order to enjoy the freedom he desires, and which he knows will never be tolerated by the Congregation, even though these actions might not be grave in themselves. 279

But if the Congregation, as we have seen, preserves this admirable Excellence, it is an Excellence of the Congregation and not of the individual subjects. No subject, be he priest or layman, must presume that, because he is a son of St Philip, he cannot lose his chastity. He can most certainly lose it if he does not guard it, if he does not adopt the necessary measures, if he does not observe the Rules which serve as a bulwark to defend it, if he does not fortify himself with the good examples of others. He may sin in spite of all the warnings which he will have in the Congregation, if he will not make use of them, because he is but man; as the most austere hermits can sin, separated from the world in secluded cloisters or hidden in the deepest caverns.

But not for this will the Congregation cease to preserve itself pure, because, as we have seen, it can immediately purge itself by dismissing from its house those who dare to defile it. On the other hand, that subject who is so miserable as to lay no store by chastity is, as it were, forced to leave the Congregation of his own accord, in order to be able to satisfy his passions; or if he chooses to wait to be expelled to his

own greater infamy, so be it. Those subjects alone who shall persevere
 in the Congregation will enjoy this highly prized Excellence, because
 280 they cannot persevere if they do not use the due precautions and avail
 themselves of the fitting means for maintaining themselves pure and
 chaste. Let them do their part, and the grace of vocation will add to
 the other safeguards its own most powerful assistance. St Philip will
 embrace them as his children, and the Queen of Virgins, who received
 them into the bosom of the Congregation founded by her, will load
 them with her choicest favours.

IV.

The sons of St Philip who persevere in their vocation must not rest
 satisfied with enjoying so beautiful an Excellence, but must labour
 to exalt as much as possible from the pulpit and in the confessional
 the precious virtue of chastity, which is so advantageous to souls and
 draws them so readily to perfection. They ought to commend this
 virtue as the one which imparts splendour to all the other virtues, and
 makes the road to Heaven more smooth and more easy, because it
 keeps under restraint sensuality, the deadliest enemy of Heaven; and
 because, captivating the heart of God, it draws down upon those who
 preserve it the choicest and most abundant blessings.

In order duly to exalt this beautiful virtue, it seems to me sufficient
 to point out that the Blessed Virgin Mary, the great Mother of God,
 was the discoverer and teacher of it. Before that time chastity was, as it
 were, unknown in the world; every one entered the marriage state on
 281 the honourable plea of hoping to become the ancestor of the Divine
 Messias. Mary was the first to bind herself by vow to observe chastity,
 and she loved it so dearly that rather than renounce a virtue so pleasing
 to God she would willingly have sacrificed her glorious maternity; and
 when she espoused St Joseph she was first assured that she should never
 lose it. Ah! (she might have said) I gave all my love to God from the
 first moment of my life with the firm resolution never to bestow any
 part of it on creatures. If I do not observe perfect chastity, I shall be
 obliged to give some love to creatures and to pleasures; however little it
 might be, it would be too great an affront and too serious an infidelity
 to His Divine Majesty. No, no; my heart will never be constrained
 to make such a division. Rather a thousand deaths than suffer such a
 thing!

Mark well the beautiful reason wherefore chastity is so pleasing to God. He demands our whole heart, and requires that we should love Him alone. "My son, give Me thy heart." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart." But how can we love God, and with our whole heart, if we do not observe chastity? It is true, God is content that we should love Him with an appreciative love, that is, a love of esteem, and permits us to love our neighbour with a sensible love, if it be always pure and subordinate to the love of Him. But how easy it is to overstep the bounds, and from sensible love to pass to appreciative love towards creatures, and even to prefer them sometimes to God Himself!⁹ St Paul says that those who are married think of how 282 they may please their husbands and wives, and thus in their hearts their love is divided. But those who are without husband or wife, or other loves, think how to please God alone, and keep their hearts entirely for Him; and this it is which pleases Him so much. The chaste soul gives indeed to creatures that love which is permitted, or rather which is enjoined, but without diminishing a single atom of that which is due to God alone; and knowing that God alone deserves our love, that He is jealous in the extreme, and cannot tolerate our loving any other but Him, or subordinately to Him, the chaste soul, I say, places Him as a seal upon its heart, that no other love may ever enter therein. It is for this reason that the Lord is enamoured of a chaste person, who, to avoid contracting even the slightest stain of impurity, keeps his heart closed to all others, and opens to God alone; and the more he resembles God who is a pure spirit, the more he constrains Him to love him. It is for this also that virgins are called by St Cyprian the most noble part of the flock of Christ. *Illustrior portio gregis Christi.*

O modest virgins, beloved souls, ye are therefore the favourites of God! From the beautiful lily of your purity you send up to heaven a fragrance so sweet, that God Himself often stoops to admire you, to take pleasure in you as in a garden of delights; a garden closed to all but Him. *Hortus conclusus, soror mea sponsa* [my sister, my ride, is a garden enclosed]. And you please Him, not only because you are without stain, not only for the fragrant perfume of your purity, but 283 you have pleased Him, and you do please Him still more when for His love you fight generously to preserve it. He knows full well that the world is all around you with its deceits, trying to snatch from you your

⁹ I Cor. vii. 7, *et seq.*

beautiful lily, under a thousand insidious pretexts and false reasons.

The devil will also add his suggestions, for he will not fail to attack a soul in a terrible manner to rob it of a virtue so hateful to him. And the battle does not end here; our own flesh joins in the combat with still more furious and more frequent attacks, and as it is an enemy from which we cannot fly, it easily wounds us mortally.

In short, we must confess that to live in the body as though we had no body is difficult. *Et in corpore vivere sine corpore*, was the praise given by St Jerome to virgins; and we must confess also that it is a hard battle, because so continuous: *Continua pugna et rara victoria*. [To live in the body, without the body, is a continuous struggle, and rare the victory.] God well knows all this, and compassionates you, when He sees you engaged in such pitiless warfare; but He also takes pleasure in seeing you fight with the very weapons which He lends you; He is pleased above all when He sees you conquer with His omnipotent aid, which He will never deny you if you desire it; and He is preparing immortal crowns wherewith to reward your victory.

284 St Catherine of Siena, one day in prayer, was assailed by a crowd of troublesome, impure thoughts. As purity was most dear to her heart she was deeply afflicted, fearing that she might be stained by such a struggle, when our Saviour appeared to her and said, "Thou dost please Me thus." "O my Lord," she replied, "and how is it possible that I can please Thee in the midst of such abominations?" But her Beloved answered, "Tell me, didst thou take any pleasure in having those evil thoughts?" "O my Love," the Saint replied, "I would rather suffer a thousand deaths than the shadow of one of them." "Therefore," Christ said, "thou dost please me much, because I love to see the combat." All chastity is beautiful, but that is still more beautiful which is tried by temptation. The chastity of Joseph was beautiful, but it grew more beautiful when, being tempted by his guilty mistress, he preserved it by flight. The chastity of St Alexius was beautiful, but it appeared still more beautiful when, so near the enjoyment of his marriage, he abandoned his spouse. The chastity of St Bernard was beautiful, but it was much more beautiful when, to extinguish the flame of an impure thought, he threw himself up to the throat into a frozen pond. In fact, chastity in the midst of temptations is the lily among thorns of which the Divine Spouse is so enamoured. It is a virtue so pleasing to God, that when His Divine Son became man, He willed to be born of a

Virgin Mother, bound by a vow of chastity.

O ye pure and chaste souls, ye therefore, I repeat, are the chosen ones of God, as St John was the chosen Apostle of Christ because he was a virgin. *Diligebat autem eum Jesus, quoniam specialis prerogativa castitatis ampliore dilectione fecerat dignum.* [For Jesus loved him, because his especial gift of chastity had made him worthy of a greater life.] And St John himself affirms in his Apocalypse that he saw on 285 Mount Sion, that is, in Heaven, a great multitude in the company of the Lamb, that is, of Christ, and that they followed Him alone whithersoever He went, singing a new canticle, which no man could sing but they alone. Who were these followers of the Lamb, so highly privileged? He himself answers that they were virgins: "These are they who are not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."¹⁰ Behold the beautiful privilege of those who are chaste; they alone are made worthy to follow Christ, who remains willingly in the company of pure souls; they are like unto Angels, because they live chastely in the flesh as though they were not clothed with flesh, but were pure spirits, as St Paul says, "You are not in the flesh, but in the spirit."¹¹ Indeed, in a certain way they even surpass the Angels; because the Angels having no body, it is not difficult for them to be pure. But that man, in frail mortal flesh, attacked by so many enemies, should live as though he were a pure spirit, this it is which merits the astonishment of the world and all the benedictions of Heaven.

¹⁰ Apoc. xiv. 4.

¹¹ Rom. viii. 9.

CHAPTER II

THE ELEVENTH EXCELLENCE

THE GOOD NAME WHICH THE CONGREGATION OF THE ORATORY ENJOYS IN THE WORLD

I know that in publishing in this chapter the singular esteem in which all the world holds the Congregation of St Philip, my Mother, I shall publish also my own shame, because I am so degenerate from her sanctity, I lead a life so bad and imperfect and so different from that which she would wish me, as her son, to lead. But I think it is better to undergo a little confusion myself than to omit paying a debt of justice, and to be silent about a truth acknowledged by all. Moreover, the subjects of the Congregation, finding her held in such esteem, will conceive a deeper veneration for her, and will feel themselves drawn to serve her with greater perfection.

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Lest any one should think that I exaggerate, I will write here nothing of my own, and will rest satisfied with noting down what has been said by so many men of remarkable learning and holiness, so many Bishops and Cardinals, Princes and sovereign Pontiffs, as may be seen in the Historical Memoirs of our Congregation, by Father Marciano, of the Oratory of Naples.

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The city of Rome, where, by means of St Philip, the Congregation of the Oratory came into existence, was constrained to admire and venerate it from its very cradle. The city of Naples, as soon as it learned to know the Exercises of the Oratory (by means of Baronio, Tarugi, the Venerable Giovenale Ancina, and other distinguished subjects sent hither by St Philip), wished to plant one in every corner of the town. Dr. Navarro (a man celebrated for his learning and his writings) was unceasing in his praise of so holy an Institute. Attilio Tenarolo, a renowned doctor of the illustrious College of Brescia, when the Fathers of the Oratory were seeking a better position, so as to give their Exercises with more profit, spoke in their favour before the General Council of that city in the following terms:— “My

tongue is unable to express the merit of this most pure Society. I will therefore quote the words used by Seneca in his ninety-sixth Letter; 'In order to honour God, it is only necessary to know Him.' I will say the same of this Congregation of Priests, because, to be induced to favour and honour it, it will suffice to know it. But it is not enough to know that it is a Congregation of secular priests instituted by St Philip Neri, and called the Congregation of the Oratory. To know it rightly and judge of it according to the rule taught us by the Divine Master in the seventh chapter of St Matthew, 'By their fruits ye shall
 288 know them,' it will be necessary to cast a glance at their works and their mode of life. I will not enter here into their interior life, nor investigate the hours which they daily spend in prayer, meditation, mortifications, and disciplines, all of them particular objects of this venerable Institute; but putting aside their exemplary innocence and holiness, and dwelling only on their external actions, I will give a brief sketch of their manner of life. The Divine Offices every feast-day in their Church with pomp and solemnity; all their ecclesiastical functions performed with exactness, with the majesty of the sacred rites and ceremonies and with sumptuous vestments. No festivals could be more harmonious and delightful than those in the Church of these Fathers, from the choice music which is performed three times on every feast-day, at the High Mass, Vespers, and Oratory. Several sermons for the people on all feasts; the administration of the Sacraments to the faithful; assiduous and diligent application to the task of advising those in perplexity of conscience, of rescuing young girls from dangerous positions, delivering families from lawsuits, settling the quarrels of private individuals; copious alms for the needy, and especially those of gentle birth; prompt visiting of the sick; daily visits to the Great Hos-
 289 pital,¹ with liberal contributions to it of eatables; assisting the dying,

¹To visit the hospitals is the rule and has been the universal practice of the Fathers and Brothers of the Oratory, and many and varied are the graces which have been obtained by them whilst exercising this work of mercy. Many Brothers have received in this act the gift of chastity, being delivered thenceforward from all rebellion of the flesh, while others have been cured thereby from their own diseases. The Venerable Father Baronio relates that he many times regained his own health amidst the sicknesses of others. God often rewarded in this way the unwearied charity of the servant of God, Giambattista Pallotta, secular priest and brother of the Roman Oratory; for when he was attacked by pain or other ailments, no sooner did he set foot on the threshold of the hospital than he was instantly relieved. And Francesco Gianotti, brother of the Little Oratory of Turin, often lay ill with fever on the morning of feast-

visits to prisons; most fruitful aid to Bishops in difficult affairs of the Church.

“In a few words, their whole life is none other than unceasing assistance given to their neighbour in every way, assiduous co-operation towards the public welfare, indefatigable promotion of the Divine worship, and all at their own expense, without any imaginable reward. Hence the theologian, Lorenzo Beyersineh, in his latest works published this opinion, that it would not be easy to find an Institute more useful to the Church than these Oratories, as you may draw from thence prelates for all needs of the times, most able subjects, without any expense to the public or to private individuals. Have I not shown you, most noble sirs, that it is but necessary to know this most useful Congregation in order to be disposed to favour it? Founded in Rome by the great St Philip Neri, in the sixteenth century, no sooner was it known to princes and prelates than it was at once favoured and honoured, so that as the Archpriest of Anversa, in his Teatro, attests, it spread immediately in many cities of Italy; it flourished in Burgundy and Flanders, &c.” Thus spoke Attilio Tenarolo, and in the writings of illustrious men we may find innumerable similar expressions and attestations. 290

St Charles Borromeo, after having assisted at all the Exercises of the Church and in the House, and having spent a day and a night in the Oratory for that purpose, said to the Fathers on leaving them: *Happy you, to possess a man who has given you such a holy Institute!*

St Ignatius Loyola showed no less esteem for it. The Venerable Ancina relates that he once declared there was no place in Rome where he could better satisfy his soul than at San Girolamo della Carità (where St Philip had begun the Exercises), for there he found greater spirituality and sanctity. The love of St Felix the Capuchin and the Venerable Giovanni Leonardi for the Oratory is well known, and the blessed Alessandro Sauli, a Barnabite, and Bishop of Aleria in Corsica, showed how highly he valued the Exercises by preaching two or three times a week from the Oratory pulpit during his visit to Rome in 1575.

St Camillus of Lellis often confessed to the Fathers of the Oratory

days; but, unwilling to fail in the usual charity of visiting the sick in the hospital, he rose from his bed, putting his trust in God, and while serving the sick, wonderful to relate, his fever left him and his strength returned, or he would be instantly cured by the very stench of the hospital.

how much he owed to them; it was by their advice that he dedicated his Order to the service of the sick, and he introduced into it exactly the same Exercises as those of the Oratory.

291 St Francis of Sales, wishing to strengthen in the faith his newly-made converts in the Chablais, founded a House of the Oratory in Thonon, and was himself named by the Pope, in a special Bull, its first Superior. For this reason Benedict XIII. gave leave to the Oratory at Naples, and to some others which asked for it, to recite the Office of this Saint as a double of the second class with an octave.

St Veronica Giuliani, the celebrated Saint of the eighteenth century, had, towards the end of her life, no less than four Philippine Fathers for directors; and St Leonard of Port Maurice and St Alphonso Liguori were both Brothers of the Little Oratory. When the latter desired to forsake the world, he implored the Fathers of the Neapolitan Congregation to admit him among them, and he would have put on St Philip's habit had not his own father prevented it.

St Joseph of Cupertino, of the Conventual Friars of St Francis, called the Congregation of the Oratory a paradise; because, said he, its rules close the door against two great monsters, namely, self-interest and ambition. One day, on returning to himself after an ecstasy of several hours, he was told that Leandro Colloredo had entered the Oratory, when he exclaimed, "The Congregation of the Oratory is a school of Divine love!" And he foretold the eminent gifts that God would bestow upon Leandro.

292 Pope Paul IV. showed on several occasions how much it grieved him not to be able to be present at the Exercises of the Oratory. St Pius V., aware of the fruit produced by the Institute, rejoiced that under his Pontificate there should be men who knew so well how to instil piety into the minds of the faithful, and to make holiness flourish in Rome. Gregory XIII. was the first to erect formally, by a Bull, the Congregation of the Oratory, giving to St Philip and his companions the Church of the Vallicella. Sixtus V. was like a father to the Congregation, so many were the graces and privileges he granted to it. On hearing that it was about to be founded in San Severino, he exclaimed, "How happy will that place be! How much good will be done there!" Clement VIII. loved the Congregation with cordial affection, and showed it publicly by creating in one promotion two Cardinals from it, namely, Tarugi and Baronio. He once said, "It was only this

manner of life and the exercise of these priests that were wanting to adorn the Church of God.” And Cardinal Bentivoglio attests that he always considered those men the most trustworthy who most frequented the Church and House of the Fathers. Paul V., with another Bull, confirmed the Congregation already erected, approving at the same time of the Constitutions. Gregory XV. was Brother and Prefect of the Little Oratory while still a secular. When he became Pope he established the Congregation in Bologna, saying, “I have always desired to see this holy Institute in my own country, and I promise to assist it to the utmost of my power.” He kept his word by giving it a church, and by bestowing many spiritual treasures upon it.

The modesty of the Congregation was so pleasing to Clement IX. that, *motu proprio*, he made the Feast of the Saint of the double rite, 293 and before issuing the Decree, he sent for the Venerable Father Mariano Sozzini, and said to him: “Father Mariano, the modesty of the Congregation in never asking any favours has forced us to become the Procurators of St Philip, and to enact that his feast may be celebrated throughout the Universal Church, *sub ritu duplici* [of double rank].” He also showed his esteem for the Oratory by sending, in preference to many others, Father Thomas Somerset, of the Oratory of Perugia, to England as his Internuncio.² The Venerable Innocent XI., besides making Cardinals two of the Congregation, namely, Colloredo and Petrucci, founded the Congregation in Como, his native place, and he had so great an esteem for it that, being asked by Monsignor Vi- 294

²This Father Thomas Somerset was probably the first English son of St Philip. He was a son of Henry Somerset, first Marquess of Worcester, famous for his devotion to the royalist cause, and his defence of Raglan Castle, who became a Catholic. His son chose a voluntary exile in early youth in order to preserve his faith untainted. He studied for many years in Perugia, and then repaired to Rome, where he received marks of honour from both Innocent X. and Alexander VII., and was made Canon of St Peter's. But the impression formerly made upon him by the virtuous lives of the Fathers of the Oratory at Perugia was so great, that he renounced all his dignities and entered the Congregation in that city, where he became distinguished for his great humility and charity. During his mission to England he might easily have fulfilled his ardent wish of giving his blood for the Catholic faith had not Charles II. constrained him to fly into Flanders, himself providing him with a passage thither. From thence he wrote an affectionate letter to his beloved Fathers at Perugia, detailing all he had done and suffered, and expressing his loving desire to return amongst them to end his days in the bosom of the Congregation he so much loved. But God ordained otherwise; he was attacked by a mortal disease at Dunkirk, and died there in 1678, aged 78.

centini, Bishop of Rieti, in 1685, for leave to transfer some religious Orders to that city and give them some simple benefices, His Holiness answered: "No, no; do this: endeavour to introduce the priests of the Oratory. These are what you want; wherever they are they do good to all, and we have never had any serious complaint against them." And when the Bishop answered that it was difficult all at once to find subjects enough to form a Congregation of St Philip, the Pope said: "This can be done by degrees. We have lately published a Bull for the foundation of the Congregation of Faenza. It began with only one priest, who was of the Congregation of Florence. He brought up some youths, and now it is a good house and goes on very well, and is of great spiritual utility to the city; and we, at the request of Father Mariano Sozzini, have granted it many privileges." From this great Pope was obtained, in the year 1680, the Bull of erection of the Congregation of this city of Savigliano, in which I live, with many privileges and indulgences.

The devotion of Benedict XIII., of holy memory, towards the Oratory and its glorious Founder was extraordinary. "I also have dared," were his words when Cardinal, "to inscribe myself as the humble son of so great a Father." He made the Feast of St Philip a day of obligation in Rome, and enriched his sepulchre with the numerous Indulgences which are gained by visiting the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem and all
 295 the other sanctuaries of the Holy Land.³ Clement XII., in token of his paternal love for the Oratory of which he was a brother, gave leave to those priests who belong to the Little Oratory of Rome to celebrate the Feast of St Philip as a double of the first class with an octave.

Benedict XIV. was most attached to the Congregation, and gave, *motu proprio*, the title of Venerable to Cardinal Baronio and to Father Pier Francesco Scarampi, who was sent to Ireland as Apostolic Nuncio by Urban VIII. on most important affairs of the Church. This Father was honoured by visions of the Infant Jesus, and died a voluntary victim of charity in the service of the plague-stricken in 1656.

When Pius VI., through the pressure of the times, was constrained to order the silver vessels of the churches to be brought to the Mint, he

³This treasure of Sacred Indulgences, which consists in thirty Plenary and forty-seven Partial Indulgences, to be gained not once only in a day, but every time the altar of St Philip is visited, was also granted by Pius VII. to the altars of the Saint in the churches of the Oratories of Venice, Padua, Verona, and Chioggia.

made a special exception in favour of those belonging to the Chapel of St Philip.

Pius VII., of glorious memory, showed his esteem for the Oratory by ordering, as soon as his unhappy reverses were past, that the Congregation should be immediately re-established in Rome before any other religious house, and should be reinstated in all its former possessions. On his return to Rome from his prolonged exile (on May 24), he said to Cardinal Mattei, while yet two miles from the city, that on the twenty-sixth of that month, the Feast of St Philip, he would hold his Papal Chapel as usual in the Chiesa Nuova, which he did to the great joy of the whole city. 296

The Cardinals who have shown special esteem for the Congregation are so numerous that they would fill a very long catalogue; and I will merely add, that they prove it by holding their Cardinalitial Chapel every year on the Feast of the Saint in the Church of the Vallicella. Moreover, most of those bishops who have the Congregation of the Oratory in their diocese, are wont to call it their right hand.

Many souls of great holiness and perfection have received from God light to know the great good wrought by the Congregation of the Oratory, and to esteem it very highly. Mgr. F. Luigi di Silva, Archbishop of Evora in Portugal, who for his great charity was compared to St John the Almoner and Thomas of Villanova, desired to do some good work on a large scale for his flock. One Christmas night, being rapt in fervent prayer, he asked of God to make known to him what would be most pleasing to His Divine Majesty, and he was given to understand that he could do nothing more pleasing to Heaven, or more advantageous to his flock, than to found the Congregation of the Oratory. This he accordingly did in the town of Estremos, in his diocese.

Still more remarkable was what occurred in the diocese of Monreale, near Palermo. Some priests of the United Greek Rite determined to live together under the rule of some religious Institute. In doubt as to which they should choose, they resolved to write on slips of paper the names of several Greek Fathers, and among them placed that of St Philip, to whom one of them had a special devotion. The name first taken out of the urn was to be that of their Father and Protector. God so disposed that the name of St Philip should be the first, to their great astonishment. But they were not content: being Greeks, they wished 297

to have for their Father a Greek Saint. The names were all replaced in the urn, and twice more the same attempt was made with the same result; on each occasion the name of Philip was the first to appear. At last they cheerfully became his sons, so manifest was the will of the Saint to be their holy Father. While they preserve the Greek Rite, they observe celibacy, the Latin discipline, and all the rules of the Oratory, to the great profit of those of their own nation.

I will mention only one other instance, that of the Venerable Mother Serafina di Dio, foundress of seven monasteries of the Carmelite Order. This great servant of God was so devout to St Philip that she never failed to pay him the greatest reverence, and to procure for him all possible honour, and she succeeded in causing him to be chosen in a Chapter of her Monastery as one of its Protectors, and afterwards Protector of the whole island of Capri. In order to imbibe the spirit of a Saint, so full of divine charity, she often read his life and studied to imitate his virtues. She often conversed about them with her religious, and regulated her government of them according to the instructions of the Saint.

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Among the many devotions which she was accustomed to practice in his honour, one was to kiss thirty-three times the most holy feet of the Crucifix, in thanksgiving for the glory bestowed upon the Saint. While she was doing this with an extraordinary expansion of affection, excusing herself to the Saint that she did not know how to do anything else for his honour, he manifested himself to her in a state of glory, prostrate at the feet of Jesus Christ, in the act of reverently kissing them in her name, and such was the consolation which she felt at this action performed by the Saint in her name, that she thought she should die of joy. On the vigil of his feast she seemed to be rapt into Paradise, and she saw St Philip so enveloped in the flames of divine charity that his heart appeared like a furnace of fire; and these flames were not like those of earth, but clear, pure, and resplendent. The servant of God also saw that her own heart burnt sensibly, but not so much as that of the Saint; therefore she prayed him to obtain for her more fire of divine love. Then the Saint united his heart with hers, and thus united they sent forth a great flame; she felt so much love that she could not express it, and the Saint invited her to rejoice in the presence of the Lord, and to sing His praises, desiring her to repeat with him these words, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Magnus Dominus et laudabilis*

nimis [Holy, holy. holy, great is the Lord and worthy of all praise], adding that it is impossible to find in the most devout Canticles words more pleasing to God. Similar demonstrations of love were made by St Philip to his devotee every year on his feast, and on those days he 299 used to bestow his graces on her in profusion; and as he accepted her for his daughter, he desired that she should look on all the subjects of the Institute as her sons.

In order that she might conceive a greater esteem and love for his Congregation, he showed her one day, in the presence of the most Blessed Virgin, the nobility of the state and the spirit of the Institute, of which he was wont to call the great Mother of God herself the foundress, although she had chosen to use him as he instrument.

This happened on the night preceding the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, in the year 1669, and she gave an account of it to her director, a great servant of God (Father Vincenzo Avinatri of the Oratory of Naples), in the flowing letter:—

“Would that I could speak, not with the pen, but with the tongue of a seraph; that I could write, not with ink, but with my own blood, and that this letter were a burning fire which would consume the whole Congregation. Oh! that I could send the very interior of my heart to make it understood and to explain what I heard the night of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, from her very self, and from our and your holy Father Philip, respecting his Congregation. I saw the Saint, with the great Mother of God, in a flame of fire, and surrounded with light; I prayed to him much, both for his Congregation, and for each one in particular; and with a sweet countenance, he told me many 300 beautiful things, of which I will tell you some briefly.

“He showed me what his sons ought to be, and the dignity of the Congregation, made, so to speak, in the likeness of God and of the three Divine Persons, and especially of the Person of the Holy Spirit; and the Saint told me that the subjects of the Congregation cannot be called by any other name than that of sons of the Holy Ghost, and that the Congregation may be called the temple of the Holy Ghost, and he said: ‘It was not my spirit that founded it, but the Holy Spirit, and as such they ought to work, and to be all love towards God and their neighbour; and I wish for nothing else for them, but that they should burn with that fire of which they are the sons.’ And he showed me clearly that this is required from such a Congregation. I saw the care

which he takes of it, and the many caresses which he bestowed upon some Fathers in particular, and the encouragements he gave them. I saw also how the Blessed Virgin showed herself the Patroness and the Protectress of the Congregation, and it gave me much consolation. Oh! I have not words to explain the grandeur of such a Congregation, and its noble state and position, because it has no other obligation, except that of loving God alone, who is the summit and perfection of everything: sons chosen for great heights of spirituality. Oh! how noble it seemed to me, and how extravagant appeared the least imperfection in them, on account of the dignity of their condition, and the
 301 sweetness of such a pleasant state, which I saw to be like a meadow, delightful with the gentle breezes of the Holy Spirit, who sweetly moves all His sons to work nobly, and of their own free will. I learnt in general, that in proportion to the great nobility of this state, a greater and more spotless correspondence to it is required. I saw how terrible a thing was the slightest spot and stain of imperfection in him who professes it; and the Saint told me to recommend them all with the greatest affection to the Lord. All this was in general. Blessed and praised for ever be God!

“I understood then in the mind of the holy Father, what he wanted to tell and to point out to me, by showing me so many beautiful things. Without speaking, he had explained to me the perfection we must have in order to be sons of light. It would be a monstrous thing if fire generated snow, if light brought forth darkness, if crystal produced mud. I know not how to explain myself better, but I understood the sense of what the Saint wished to tell me. It would be a marvel if a sweet tree brought forth bitterness. How much greater wonder would it be, if in any of the sons of St Philip, who are called sons of the Holy Spirit, there should be any defect! I saw the sanctity which such a state demands, and how he who lives in this state can easily obtain it, and ought to possess it. I saw also the Saint caressing many Fathers, and encouraging many others. I write all briefly, for I had a night and a
 302 day of such delights as God alone knows.”

So great was the esteem which Serafina conceived of the Institute of the Oratory and of its members, owing to these manifestations made to her by the Saint, that she ever after desired to have one of our Congregations at Capri, in order that her nuns might live under its direction. But seeing that she could not succeed in this, she managed often

to have one of our Fathers as extraordinary confessor to the monastery, or to preach some sermon there, or to perform some other ecclesiastical function on the solemn feasts in her Church: and she would always have for her own director and that of her nuns the above-mentioned Father Vincenzo Avinatri, and with some others of our Fathers she corresponded by letter. She received in her monasteries, with more pleasure than any others, the postulants offered by our Fathers, and held them in greater affection, because they had been brought up in the spirit of St Philip: and whilst giving them the habit, the Saint on several occasions told her that he had himself sent them to her. With like pleasure she received for triennial confessors, those priests who were proposed to her by the Fathers of the Congregation, because they were frequenters of the Oratory. Considering how many favours she had received from St Philip, and how often he had recommended to her his sons, from whom also she had received so much spiritual and temporal aid, she earnestly longed to make them some signal return in token of her gratitude. She prayed continually for the Congregation, and desired her nuns to do the same. If any of our Fathers passed to 303 another life, she offered all possible suffrages for their souls until it was shown to her that they were in heaven. Nor was there, as long as she lived, any sick person in the Congregation of whom she did not know by revelation, whether he would recover or die, as also what happened to him after death. Some also she saw enter immediately into glory, others in Purgatory; not one was lost. All this is written in the life of this great servant of God.

I.

The testimony of so many great and illustrious personages should suffice to prove the good name which the Congregation of the Oratory enjoys in the world; nevertheless, I think that it will not be without profit to add the attestations of those who being also of much authority, have moreover lived in it for many years.

The first of these is Cardinal Francesco Maria Tarugi, who, in a letter written to Father Bordini, entreating him to return quickly to his "nest", from which he was absent, having been obliged to go to Poland with Cardinal Aldobrandini, the Pope's Legate, speaks thus: "I venture to say that in the Church of God there is no more useful undertaking or exercise than this, for two reasons; both on account of the familiar

and devout form of preaching; and because it is daily, with the addition of mental prayer every evening, and the mornings of fasts, and because the Institute sends abroad so many men to perform such numerous works of charity." This great man used to call the Congregation of the Oratory a foretaste of Paradise.

When taken out of it against his will by Clement VIII. and named Archbishop of Avignon, he lamented with unceasing tears over his loss, expressing his sorrow in a letter written to Father Antonio Talpa in these words: "O peace! O happiness of so many tens of years! Ah, how have I lost you! Who will grant me to return *in dies antiquos* when the light of sensible grace shone upon me!"

Archbishop Tarugi also earnestly implored the Fathers not to remove his name from the community list, saying, "As I am inscribed upon your tablet, so I believe I am on the hearts of your Reverences, for you are all engraved on mine; and when you place the sign on leaving the House, or returning, I beg of your charity to raise your eyes to my name and breathe a prayer to God for me, because I am inscribed in a place of tranquillity and peace, while I am actually on the sea in the midst of winds and waves, rocks and monsters, *ut de his omnibus liberet me Dominus* [that the Lord may deliver me from them all]." In writing to the Fathers of the Congregation, he felt bound in charity, knowing the sublimity of their state, to exhort them to persevere in it with these words: "All of you hold firm to the good which God has given you in that state of life which you enjoy. To you, my reverend Fathers at home, I turn, and I look at you with envy, and rejoice in your good, even though I, through my pride, have been deprived of it." When a Cardinal he endeavoured several times to renounce the Sacred Purple, and to return to his beloved Congregation, but, unable to succeed in this, he at length obtained, to his no small consolation, leave to spend the last days of his life and to breathe his last sigh within its holy walls.

And equally great was the esteem in which his brother and colleague, the Venerable Cardinal Baronio, held their common mother. When, notwithstanding his entreaties and resistance, he was forced out of his cherished home by the Pope's command, he kept in his new dignity of Cardinal the keys of his former cell. For his own consolation he would often go to the community dinner of the Fathers, wait in the refectory, assist in the choir at Vespers, administer Holy Communion

to the faithful in the church of the Vallicella, and preach to the people as before; he would have no other confessor than the one that was appointed for the community, and he went to confession publicly in the confessional in the Church, without even permitting a cushion to be placed for him to kneel upon. In his extreme old age he retired into some rooms near the Church, to end his days in his old nest. And the same was done by Cardinal Leandro Colloredo.

The Venerable Father Giovanni Tommaso Eustachio, of the Congregation of the Oratory of Naples, gave a signal proof of his esteem and affection for it by the tears he shed when made Bishop of Larino by Paul V., being inconsolable during the four years that he governed that diocese. He presented so many petitions, and employed so many means, and such powerful intercessors, that he ended by obtaining from that Pope permission to lay aside the mitre and return to his own beloved Congregation, where he continued to lead a life of austerity, more admirable than imitable; and the processes have been formed for his beatification. 306

The venerable servant of God, Giovenale Ancina, who was also one of the first sons of St Philip, was so in love with the Institute, that writing to his brother, Father Giovanni Matteo, he told him that he was composing some devout poetry in honour of the Congregation, as a sort of outlet for the love which consumed him: "The Lord ruleth us (he would say), and we shall want nothing. He hath set us in a place of pasture."⁴ Another time he wrote, "Salute the Fathers and all, even to the cook and scullion boy, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to loose." His sole delight was in the Fathers and Brothers of the Congregation. When created Bishop of Saluzzo, after having used every endeavour to avoid the dignity—even escaping by flight from Rome, but all in vain—he esteemed it a great honour to be allowed to carry away with him the key of the room which he had occupied in the Congregation.

In short, there has never been a man of great talent and learning, or sanctity of life, in our Congregation, who has not pronounced the highest eulogium upon it; indeed the more holy and learned they were, the higher were their praises; and with all their humility and modesty they could not help rendering this act of justice to their mother, from whom they were conscious of deriving such great benefits, acknowl- 307

⁴Ps. xxii. 1.

edging their deep confusion at not having (as it seemed to them) corresponded fully to the greatness of the grace bestowed upon them in being received into the Congregation.

If, however, it were only the Fathers of the Congregation who had so great an esteem for it, we might think that their judgment was not wholly impartial; and if it were externs alone who thought so highly of it, they might possibly be deceived, because from without they see its great merits, but do not penetrate into what there may be of imperfection within. But when we see strangers joining with those of the household in esteeming so highly the Congregation of St Philip, it is evident, both on account of the good which is seen from without, and that which is experienced within, that it is a work of great glory to God, of immense advantage to our neighbour, and of much spiritual profit to its members.

II.

This good name which the Congregation enjoys among externs, who only see it from without, and among the Fathers themselves who are within, ought to beget in all its subjects a deep respect, a great veneration, and a most singular love for it.

308 Father Licinio Pio, founder of the Congregation of the Oratory at Bologna, insisted much on our subjects having a proper esteem for the state to which they were called by God, and he used to say, "Our holy Father has left us an Apostolic Institute, like that which flourished in the primitive Church, which made men saints filled with love for God that for His sake they gave up property, honours, greatness, dignities, and even life itself. Thus did St Gallicanus, at the persuasion of St John and St Paul, and many other Saints likewise. This manner of life which we have adopted ought to work in us the same effect: we must lose all affection for what we have, in order to be able to love our God alone."

The subjects of the Congregation must not, however, on account of this good name which it possesses, cherish any esteem for themselves, nor allow themselves to be surprised into any vanity or pride, thinking themselves superior to other priests or religious; they must humble themselves greatly, as being unworthy of so great a grace to which God has called them, without any merit of theirs, they must be full of fear that, the Congregation of the Oratory being so holy,

they themselves are not what they ought to be, and what the world takes them to be. Let all the Fathers and Brothers labour, by their exact observance of the Institute and by their good life, to maintain this Excellence for their mother; let them be most careful not to allow any failing of theirs to cause that good name to be lost which, through the Divine goodness, it has acquired in the whole world.

Every priest is bound to acquire a good reputation in the eyes of the world, according to the warning of the Holy Spirit: "Take care of a good name; for this shall continue with thee, more than a thousand 309 treasures precious and great."⁵ That is to say, he must persevere in heroic acts of virtue, practising them whenever he has the occasion, so as to gain a good name before God and the Angels, before good men, and even evil men; because although the wicked live badly, and are immersed in vice, so great is the beauty and attraction of virtue, that they cannot do less than admire and love it.

But a subject of the Congregation must not rest content with acquiring and preserving a good name for himself alone, he must do it also for the sake of his Congregation, since the reputation of a religious becomes the reputation of his Order, as Cornelius à Lapide says: *Fama enim religiosi, est fama religionis*. If religious are good, their Order will be in good repute; if they are bad, their Order will lose credit with all. And so it will be with our Congregation. But, alas! how little is needed for us to lose this good name, because the world is always inclined to judge ill, and is unwilling to see men by their holy lives cast shame on its dissolute ways; if then it perceives some defect in a subject of the Congregation, it readily concludes the Congregation does not possess that holiness which was attributed to it. Just as one little fly in a vase of precious balsam, is enough to spoil the whole, and to destroy its sweet smell, so will the fault of one of one subject be enough to de- 310stroy the good name of the Congregation. A single immodest word or jest, a manner too free and jovial, or too harsh and rough, or some little rudeness on his part, will suffice to make the ignorant or malevolent say, that all the others resemble him; and without reflecting that one member of a body may be infirm when all the others are in a good state, people will lose their esteem for the whole body. It would therefore be no light matter if a Philippine Father were to be seen loitering in the public streets, and talking to the groups of people, or standing

⁵ Ecclus. xli. 15.

in company with others to look at a play represented in public, or at certain games and similar spectacles; or if a Father or Brother were so attached to his own interest, that he were to quarrel or dispute warmly with tradesmen, with the tailor, shoemaker, or cabman, about every little trifle. There is a way of bargaining, of bringing forward our reasons, without making so much noise, and sometimes giving scandal; and we should rather let men even take what belongs to us than cause the slightest scandal; remembering the canon: *Servum Dei non licet litigare* [a servant of God should not go to law]. It is but too true that the laity are more shocked by a self-interested priest, than by a man of dissolute life. They say at once: "There is more trouble with priests and religious than with laymen;" and as they know that these have given up the world, and are provided with food in their own houses or convents, they cannot understand how they can be so fond of property and money. They would excuse a fit of anger, or impatience, or even sometimes an immodesty; they (especially good people) would

311 consider that it was an impulse of the moment, without thought or advertence, an unforeseen slip; but they cannot forgive any attachment to money. Far, far from us be anything that can be called by the odious name of covetousness; for it would be enough to discredit, not merely the subject stained with such a vice, but the whole Congregation. Sometimes its reputation is lost through the mere appearance of interestedness, and until laymen are fully persuaded that there is no such thing amongst us, but that simple justice is all we seek, they will have no opinion of us. What, then, would happen if there were any in reality!

III.

The good name of the Congregation is lost, not merely when a subject falls into the faults which I have pointed out, but also when he does not fulfil the obligations prescribed by the Institute.

Although he may be of spotless life, very recollected, and exemplary in word and deed, if he does not fulfil all the duties towards his neighbour, to which, as the world knows, he is bound by his rule, this alone suffices to destroy all his credit, and in consequence, that of the whole Congregation, for men would say: "This is not a real Philippine, and his Congregation is not what it pretends to be."

A priest of the Oratory must be all intent upon his own sanctification. He must be humble, and walk with simplicity; he must be a man of prayer, must work with fervour, and deal with all with due modesty, affability, and sweetness; he must observe his rules punctually, obey his superiors, and show forth in all his actions that he seeks God alone as did his holy Father. If he does not act thus, he will be called by the world a priest of the Oratory, but he will not be truly such: *Vocatus presbyter Oratorii, non vere presbyter*. He will be a Philippine in appearance, because he wears the habit of St Philip, and lives in his Congregation; but not in reality, because his actions are not like those of St Philip. Moreover, the Saint exacts of each of his sons that he should be truly an apostolic man, not resting satisfied with sanctifying himself, but labouring to sanctify also those whom he is destined to serve in the Congregation to which he belongs. To succeed well in this he must be ready at all hours to serve his neighbours in their spiritual necessities, without giving a thought to cold, heat, sleep, fatigue, or sufferings of any kind. If he do not labour in this way, he will be called an apostle; but in his conscience he will not be able to consider himself as such. 312

The prophet Elias was a man of extraordinary burning zeal for the honour of the true God of Israel, and therefore he received the name of *Zealot*, and he himself gloried in having such a title, hoping that it would render him dear to God, as a servant or minister who is zealous for his service is dear to a king. Such a title was indeed due to this holy man, because he was continually afflicted and consumed with zeal. He was poor, naked, emaciated, without home or clothing, and passed his days sorrowfully in a dreary cave. Notwithstanding such poverty and detachment from earthly things, such fasts and sufferings, 313 God was not satisfied with Elias, and asked him what he was doing in this solitude: "What dost thou here, Elias?" And he answered: "With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant: they have thrown down Thy altars: they have slain Thy prophets with the sword."⁶ And the holy prophet also confessed that he remained there hidden: "For they seek my life to take it away." Then God bade him go forth and display his zeal in the face of His sworn enemies, and of the monarchs themselves, even at the risk of his life.

⁶ 3 Kings xix. 9.

The Fathers of the Oratory are commonly called Fathers zealous for the honour of God and the salvation of souls, and from this singular zeal is derived the good name which the Congregation enjoys in the world. But if, like Elias, they live hidden, concealed in their rooms, content to weep at the foot of the crucifix over the sins of the people, the scandals and abuses in their city, the churches profaned, preachers criticised and mocked, priests reviled and devotion scorned, it might be said to them with reason, And is this your zeal? Go forth, my dearest brethren, openly to the battle, if you wish to deserve the title of zealous. Prayer must, without doubt, have the first place. This is necessary in order to move God to grant the graces required that sinners may be brought to conversion, and that you may have the light
 314 to know how to speak, and to find the proper remedies for their ills. But with prayer you must also join preaching. You must declaim from the pulpits, or in the Oratories, against those vices which you know to infect your city. You must fulfil your duties in the confessional with sweetness, prudence, and discretion, but also with apostolic vigour. You must courageously refuse absolution to those who will not leave a proximate occasion of sin, or who refuse to restore the property or good name of their neighbour, even though they be persons of high birth and position. You must not fear the frowns of the great, but exhort all privately to do good, to fly from evil, without being afraid of appearing scrupulous or over-zealous. You must study, in short, all the most efficacious means of hindering sin, destroying dens of iniquity, and impressing true devotion on all hearts. If you thus work, the title of “zealous” will befit you. True zeal, since it is begotten by the love we have for God, can never remain idle; it must work, labour, and do great things; if it refuse to labour, it is no longer true zeal.

Zeal burns like fire; and like fire is insatiable. It is not deterred by the difficulties it encounters; it undertakes everything, and nothing can daunt it. Like the Apostle, it prefers, to its own consolations and pleasures, sufferings and labours and all that is most painful in this life. Zeal, like love, says St Thomas, does great things, and considers them but little; it labours for a long time, and all the time it has spent
 315 in labour seems to it but a moment. Christ had done many great things, and suffered infinite pains; and when these were mentioned by the two disciples who were going to Emmaus with Him, although without recognizing Him, as He was in the form of a pilgrim, He

simply said: "What things?"⁷ as if to say: What is all this compared to the love I bear to men, and the zeal for their good which burns in My breast?

The Saints, imitators of their Saviour, has true zeal, and were never content with working and suffering little. They did and suffered much, and all seemed to them a mere nothing. Our holy Father St Philip, after having laboured so much, and suffered so many persecutions in Rome for its sanctification, just as if he had neither laboured nor suffered, wished to go to the Indies to carry thither the name of Jesus Christ at the cost of his own life; and he would have gone had he not been warned from heaven that his Indies were to be in Rome. When he went to confession, he always accused himself with many tears of never having done any good. St Francis of Sales, after having converted to the holy faith 72,000 heretics, and sanctified so many souls by his zeal, his sweetness, and his writings, thought that he had not yet done anything for God, and a little before his death he called himself, in all sincerity of heart, a useless, useless servant. This is true zeal, never satisfied, however much it may work and suffer for God; not content with desiring the sanctification of every soul, but endeavouring to procure it in every possible way; not only mourning over 316 the many offences which it sees committed against the Most High, but labouring to prevent them at all costs. Such must be the conduct of a priest of the Oratory if he desires to merit being called a zealous, apostolic man, and a true son of St Philip. If he work in this way, he will acquire a good name for himself, and will preserve the good name of the Congregation.

IV.

I should not wish, however, that the Fathers of the Oratory should be so enamoured of their good reputation, as not to be always disposed and willing to lose it, when God permits it, without fault of theirs. St Philip said, that he who is not ready to lose his honour will not make progress in spirituality. Therefore, he who wishes to advance in perfection must be ready to suffer the loss of his reputation when he has given no cause for it, consoling himself with the thought that he is innocent of that which is imputed to him.

⁷Luke xxiv. 19.

Every priest, every religious, who fulfils the office of an apostle, who preaches, hears confessions, visits prisons, the sick, the hospitals, settles lawsuits and strife, and prevents sin in its various forms, is exposed to calumny; because all will not take in good part that which he says and does. It is easy for an ignorant or malicious man to take amiss the words and actions of a good and holy man, and to calumniate him. It is easy for some silly, senseless woman to defame a truly apostolic man with her venomous tongue. It is easy for an idle, envious, or ill-disposed person, unable to suffer the reproaches of his own conscience, or the praise which he hears given to some exemplary and zealous priest, to endeavour to lessen his honour, to blame his sermons, his manner of directing souls, and to discredit him even with his own penitents. But what is to be done? If such is the will of God, there is no better remedy than resignation and patience.

But should not every man, and still more every religious, watch over his good name, according to the text quoted above, *Curam habe de bono nomine* [take care over your good name]? Yes, but this applies to our endeavouring to preserve it by our good actions, without ever doing anything which is dishonourable or unworthy of a good Christian or religious, and not to its being taken away by the malice of others, when God so permits it as a trial of our virtue. The Eternal Father suffered the reputation of His Divine Son to be defamed by the blackest of calumnies. Shall He not then permit it in the case of men who are sinners, and who, if they do not deserve the disgrace on account of the sin which is falsely imputed to them, deserve it greatly on account of some other hidden offence which they have committed? Jesus Christ, who was impeccable by nature, most holy in all His works, was defamed when on earth in the basest and most cruel manner. He was discredited in His manners, in His mode of life, in His doctrine. Because He had followers, He was called seditious; indiscreet, because He showed zeal; a sorcerer, because He worked miracles; a Samaritan and possessed with devils, because He drove out devils. In short, He was reckoned holy by very few, and by most was deemed to be a sinner and friend of sinners, a deceiver, a blasphemer, worse than Barabbas and the very thieves themselves. Oh my God! Jesus the innocent, the holy One, innocence and sanctity itself, who came into the world to load it with benefits, to promulgate the holiest laws and to confirm them by His own most holy example, had to pass for an impious man,

an inventor of false doctrine, and as such to be condemned to the most infamous and cruel death, that of the Cross. Should we therefore be astonished if a malignant tongue, by a few false words, robs us of a little of our reputation?

Could not Jesus have defended Himself, made known His innocence, confounded His calumniators and punished them? Undoubtedly He might have done so; nevertheless He did not defend Himself; He was silent, He said not a word. *Jesus autem tacebat* [but Jesus was silent]. He bore in patience and in peace a suffering so painful to His spirit, for being the noblest and worthiest of all in heaven or on earth, He must have been very sensitive on the point of honour. But He willed to suffer this tempest of calumny to set us an example of suffering it with resignation and without revenge; nay more, without even defence, except in certain cases. This is indeed a great suffering, and must be very dear to Him, for thus we sacrifice to Him our honour, the greatest of all the goods which we enjoy in this world.

To suffer insults with patience is a very generous action, but still 319 insults, though they are wounds to our heart, so delicate and sensitive with regard to our reputation, are easily healed; either because the person who has uttered them in anger, unsays them or makes excuses; or even if he does not, the world pays little attention to them, knowing them to have been uttered under the emotion of violent passion, which does not listen to reason; it compassionates the person insulted, and esteems him for his patience, at the same time condemning the aggressor.

But calumny and detraction, for the most part, make an irreparable rent in our honour, either because there are few who have the courage to retract and unsay them; or because the world, which is always inclined to judge evil of every one, easily believes whatever it is told in cold blood. It is an heroic and almost divine action to suffer so cruel a wound by sacrificing our honour to God, because honour is the very essence of the life and happiness of man. How fortunate is the man who can make this great sacrifice to God, in imitation of Christ who so willingly sacrificed His honour to His Heavenly Father, saying: *Ego non quero gloriam meam; est qui querat, et judicet* [I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and He shall judge].⁸ I consider the man who can make such a sacrifice to be a saint. But

⁸ John viii. 50.

how few have this courage!

There are generous men, invincible in all else, who although they are beaten are never discouraged, nor allow themselves to be frightened by either sword or canon; who are ready at all hours to surrender either property or life; and yet if they hear of a supposed calumny, or a murmur made against them, they are at once cast down, and if they do not succeed in healing the wound by causing the murmurer to retract, they are in the depths of despair. And what is worse, they seek to cover their weakness with the mantle of virtue and the words of Holy Scripture. They assert that God has said that He will never cede His honour to another: *Gloriam meam alteri non dabo* {I shall not give my glory to another};⁹ and that the Holy Spirit has also said: *Calumnia conturbat sapientem et perdet robur cordis illius* [calumny disturbs the wise man, and loses the strength of his heart].¹⁰ It is easy to answer this. First, there is a great difference between God and a worm such as man. Honour is in justice due to God, nor can He yield it to others without ceasing to be God; but a poor creature, how can he aspire to honour when he deserves only ignominy? Secondly, it is true that calumny disturbs the wise man, but the wise of this world, and not those wise with heavenly wisdom, who truly love God and follow Christ. These, far from being troubled by calumnies and murmurings against them, take pleasure and even glory in them, knowing that to do much good, and receive calumny by way of recompense, and yet not to cease from doing good, is a noble deed. Is it not against God Himself that the blackest calumnies and the most horrible blasphemies are vomited forth? Would you make yourself more than God, more than Jesus Christ? You exclaim that your calumniator is a wretch, an infamous fellow, who speaks out of mere envy, a man without faith or conscience. Well, be it so. Does giving vent to your feelings heal perchance the wound in your heart? Because he is outrageous and has spoken evil, would you make yourself as foolish as he is by defending yourself against the excesses of an unguarded tongue? Moreover, how will you defend yourself? with what arms? Do you wish to put to death the calumniator? But this would be a sin which would send you to hell, and would dishonour you more during your whole life than the blackest calumnies in the world. No, we do not wish to go so far.

⁹ Isa. xliii. 8.

¹⁰ Ecclus. vii. 8.

We know that vengeance is reserved to God, that He commands us to forgive, and this is enough; but we wish to make our innocence known to the whole world. And how will you bring this about? You will have to speak of it to many who know nothing about it, and thus stain yourself more and more. You will have to repeat again and again that the calumniator is a liar, a scoundrel, a man without any conscience; you must put to his account other calumnies, and show that he has spoken more lies than words; you must rake up his family history and disclose all its shortcomings. Behold how you plunge yourself into a thousand sins, since it is never lawful for you to employ other calumnies and murmurings in your own defence. Besides, if you grow warm in defending yourself, this very warmth, which will be easily taken for passion, will make men believe or at least suspect that you are not innocent; on the other hand, if you remain quiet and indifferent to all gossip, by thus proving yourself to be a man of Christian virtue, you 322 will probably be judged innocent.

There are certainly some cases in which it is not only lawful, but even of obligation, to defend yourself against calumnies; as for instance, if a person, through the loss of his former good name and reputation, could no longer work for the salvation of souls; such as a bishop, a parish priest, or a preacher under certain circumstances; and St Paul did so for this end; but generally speaking, the best way of silencing both calumny and calumniators, is to trust in God, who, at the proper time and place, will undertake our defence far better than we can do; to despise their attacks, not to trouble ourselves about them, nor even to deign to consider or listen to them. *Spreta evanescent*, "What we despise, vanishes," says Tertullian, and if only we despise calumny, it vanishes into smoke, and this smoke stifles the calumny in the heart of the calumniator himself.

King David, who had in truth the heart of a hero, well understood how to despise scorn and calumny. "But I as a deaf man heard not: and as a dumb man not opening his mouth."¹¹ And when the low-born Semei dared publicly to call him a man of blood and the murderer of King Saul, and his attendants offered to go and cut off the head of this cur, he said, "Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him curse David: and who is he that shall dare say, Why hath

¹¹ Ps. xxxvii. 14.

323 he done so?"¹² Let us also look at things in this light. We desire greatly that our sins may be forgiven us, but this cannot be without our doing some penance; here is one ready to our hand. And would we refuse it from the sole fear of losing a little of our reputation and honour? What sort of thing is honour? Of what use is it? What matters it to us that we should be well or ill thought of? Our true honour consists in serving God, and nothing else; all the rest is vanity.

When there was so much murmuring in Rome against our holy Father St Philip Neri, his sermons, his visits to the seven churches with his penitents, in short against all his holiest actions, interpreting everything in the worst sense, he said to those who expressed sympathy for him, "Ah, let them say what they will. When I shall have been well mortified, God will cause this persecution to cease."

When St Teresa was accused of being a frivolous, hypocritical woman, and called vain, possessed, a woman of bad character, and even a witch, and was declared to be such from the pulpit, what did she say? "I have begged my confessor to reveal all my confessions and to proclaim aloud all my sins. Why do they not go to him to learn all my faults, and to publish them to the whole world? The greatest happiness which could befall me, would be, for the love of Jesus, to be covered with the deepest confusion, and to be held by all as excommunicated."

324 Father Alvarez of the Society of Jesus, for many years her confessor, a man of extraordinary virtue, as horribly calumniated in a Provincial Congregation, for which he was publicly reprov'd in the presence of all the Fathers. Nature felt the cruel blow and longed to resent it and to defend itself, but before acting he asked advice. He said confidentially to the Father next to him, "I am wrongfully calumniated; what should I do?" "Ah," replied this Father, "here would be a fine occasion for you to acquire merit in the sight of God by suffering this false accusation in silence; but considering that your good name is necessary in Spain where you live, and where you are the confessor of great personages and of princesses, that you train the novices of the Society, and do many other works for the glory of God, I advise you to defend yourself, and to make known your innocence." As this counsel coincided with his natural inclination, he did not wish to trust him who suggested it and even urged it. Turning to the Father on the other side

¹² 2 Kings xvi. 10.

of him, who was a great servant of God, he said, "I tell you, *sub sigillo*, that I am wrongfully accused, what should I do—be silent or defend myself?" He answered: "Be silent! suffer, and trust in God. He will defend you when He sees fit." Between two advisers of such different opinions what was he to do? He might take whichever pleased him; but being the holy man he was, he followed the opinion most repugnant to nature and self-love, and which was, without doubt, of greater perfection. He was silent, and underwent this grave trial with heroic courage. What was the consequence? He himself told a friend, that from that moment God favoured him with extraordinary graces, 325 and his soul made much greater progress than before. Nor did this calumny diminish the fruit which he hoped for in the souls of others: for when his innocence became known to his superiors, he was still more venerated by the Society, and by all Spain.

A very great calumny was also laid to the charge of St Francis of Sales, namely, that he had made by letter an assignation with a woman of bad life; for so perfectly had his handwriting been imitated by a wicked man, that he himself on seeing the letter confessed that it was his handwriting, but said nevertheless that he had not written it. This letter had been seen by many in the city, and by the Duke de Nemours, who, thinking it to be true, exclaimed, "In whom is it possible now to trust?" We may imagine the outcry raised by the Saint against this imposture, believed by many to be true. He, however, would never defend himself, nor permit others to do so. He was a bishop, and in the act of founding the Order of the Nuns of the Visitation. He might have feared that his loss of reputation would throw discredit on his writings and all his holy and apostolic works. But he cast out all fear by full confidence in God, and God did not permit any harm to result from this calumny, either to himself or to the souls committed to his charge. After the lapse of three years his innocence as proclaimed to his greater glory, for the gentleman who had forged the letter, being seized on a journey by a fearful illness, retracted on his deathbed, in the presence of many persons, his foul calumny. Behold how God 326 defends the innocent! What He did not do for His Divine Son, whom He allowed to die weighed down by calumny and with the reputation of a murderer, He generally does for His friends, in His own good time making known their innocence which had been unjustly attacked. If in any case He has allowed one of His friends to die under the stigma

of calumny, He has always ere long caused him to be recognized as a Saint and honoured on the altars.

V.

I have brought forward many examples relating to this subject, because I am most desirous of impressing, not only on the sons of St Philip, but on all those who may read this work, this great maxim—to pay no attention to calumny, to make no attempt to defend ourselves, except it be in particular cases, which each one may ask his confessor to point out; but to trust entirely in God, who will in His own good time make known our innocence. I am very desirous of this, I repeat, because I know that through the malice of men and of the devil, who always tries to combat and to cast down, if he can, the friends of God, all are liable to false accusations,—but especially priests, religious who have the care of souls; judges, both ecclesiastical and secular; ministers of state, or other personages employed in the high offices of the kingdom; princes, bishops, Cardinals, the Sovereign Pontiff; in short, the greatest and holiest persons. Few of these escape calumny; and it may be said that it is a royal road trodden by Saints who would never have been great Saints had they not suffered calumny and slander, not only with patience but also with joy,—not merely without feelings of vengeance, but even loving the very calumniators themselves, praying for them and procuring them every possible benefit. Compare yourselves with them, and from their example you will gather courage to perform an action so heroic and dear to God. Moses said: “My God, this people, for whom I have laboured so much, murmurs against me; but not for this will my heart cease to love them, for I would be willing to be shut out from the Book of Life in order that they might gain Thy pardon.” St Paul said: “These Jews load me with calumny, but I pray to God that He may not lay this to their charge; far from wishing to be avenged, I am willing to be excommunicated for their sake in order that they may be saved.” St Teresa never rested until, in one way or another, she had conferred some singular benefit on whomsoever had calumniated her. These great souls truly possessed the spirit of Jesus Christ, who lived and died weighed down by calumny. The greater the good He did, the more was He contradicted; the more miracles He wrought, the more did men murmur against Him; but He always kept perfect silence. *Jesus autem tacebat* [but Jesus was silent]. His

honour was far greater and more necessary than ours; nevertheless He sacrificed it for our good. Let us sacrifice for love of Him our own, which is of little or no account to us; nay, which may even be hurtful to us, since it may render us proud. If we are sinners, we must receive calumny in a spirit of penance, because it is deserved, and perhaps particularly deserved, because we have in former times calumniated and murmured against others. If we are innocent, let us accept it, so as to become like unto Jesus Christ. 328

To return to the good name of the Congregation, I will say, in concluding this chapter, that it has acquired this good name which it enjoys in the world through the holy works of St Philip, its founder, and those of so many of its sons, who no longer live on earth, but have left their good odour behind them; for from time to time, in all our Congregations, there have been men of remarkable and extraordinary virtues, who have left the most brilliant examples to their successors.

Now it belongs to us who live at present in the house of St Philip to preserve the good name of the Congregation, by conforming ourselves in all respects, as far as possible, to the life led by so many venerable fathers who have gone before us. For this end did the Preacher, after having taught the people of Israel, and through them all other men, the precepts of the divine law, place before their eyes the heroic examples of their ancestors, saying, "Let us now praise men of renown, and our fathers in their generation. The Lord hath wrought great glory through His magnificence from the beginning."¹³ So we, the priests of the Oratory, should read again and again the Life of St Philip and those of our ancient Fathers, to remind ourselves of the holy examples which they have set us, and which we must follow. 329

And if we, like them, observe exactly all the rules and the laudable customs of the Congregation; if we attend both to the active and the contemplative life proper to our holy Institute; if we are imbued with the spirit of charity and interior mortification; if we have due zeal for the salvation and sanctification of souls, and do not spare ourselves in labouring much for others, we shall merit the honour and glory to which they attained; and we shall preserve the good name of the Congregation, which is so necessary for the glory of God and the spiritual good of our neighbour. If any should go astray and degenerate from that perfect life which our predecessors professed, and through

¹³ Ecclus. xlv. i.

different customs and greater liberty destroy the good name of the Congregation their mother, woe betide them! *Væ! Væ! Væ!* They may be sure that God will so ordain that the Congregation will expel them from its bosom, as it has done in many cases.

I declare, however, that what I have said, am saying, or shall say, in this book, I intend merely by way of forewarning; and not that I think it is needed in any of our Congregations, which, through the mercy of God, deserve and enjoy so good a name in the world. May God deign to preserve it for His glory, and not for our own.

CHAPTER 12

THE TWELFTH EXCELLENCE

THE POWER OF THE CONGREGATION TO PURIFY ITSELF BY EXPELLING ITS SUBJECTS, AND THE LIBERTY OF ITS SUBJECTS TO LEAVE IT

In order to have a clear understanding of this chapter, I should begin 330
by saying that subjects who wish to be admitted into the Congregation of St Philip must be men of tried virtue, well fitted, and, as it were, born for the Institute. *Homines probatæ vitæ, maxime idoneos, et quasi ad Institutum natos, recipi volunt Patres ad suorum numerum aggregandos* [men of proven virtue, greatly suited and as it were born for the Institute, are those whom the Fathers wish to receive for aggregation into their number]; thus says the Rule. Without a well-grounded disposition, no one is received under eighteen years of age, nor over forty-five; nor those forbidden by the sacred canons; nor persons of weak health, or who have already been in some religious Order. It is required, moreover, that they should be men of good reputation, in the habit of going to confession to some one of our Fathers, of frequenting for some time past our Exercises, and who have some knowledge and experience of our Institute. It is therefore clear that the Congregation 331
must not readily accept everyone who presents himself, but must be most vigilant in ascertaining the real character of those who make the request.

Cardinal Tarugi tells us that St Philip, far from being lax, was rather severe in the admission of postulants, and we know what careful choice he made of his first sons, whose virtuous lives have come down to us. We must not be more easily satisfied than he was, nor must we walk blindfold in an affair of such importance as the reception of persons into a house where there are neither vows nor oaths of perseverance. It is but too evident that the facility with which men leave the Congregation comes only from the facility of entering it; and the more readily we fill our houses, the more readily are they emptied.

Father Zenobio Gharardi of Florence, a man of noble family, and of rare humility and virtue, wrote this advice to Father Lenzi of the Congregation of Faenza: "I rejoice in the fruit which your Congregation is gaining, but your Reverence must remember that our Lord chose for His twelve Apostles men of lowly station; and we see that, in general, persons of noble birth are not wont to persevere, and the Congregation of St Philip stands in need of a deep foundation of humility." To this he adds that great caution must be exercised in the reception of subjects, because a man may perhaps be an excellent priest without being fitted for the Institute. "Let us therefore pray to God, that for His glory He may give us this discernment, that our ardent desire of
 332 increasing our numbers may not make us soon weary of those whom we have but a short time before taken to ourselves with joy."

On another occasion he writes: "Reserved natures who conceal their own disposition, in order silently to observe that of others, with their *Noli me tangere* [touch me not], in their silence hatch a basilisk, which makes them gather together all the defects of the house, that when they have opportunity they may discharge their venom, and, under pretence of reform, poison the peace and simplicity of the community."

When St Paul the Apostle appeared to St Frances of Rome, he said to her: "Make a searching inquiry into the habits of those who wish to be received into the monastery, whether they be gentle, humble, and ready to do what they are told. Beware of receiving presumptuous spirits, and reserved or deceitful persons."

St Teresa, in the Way of Perfection, says: "You must not receive certain natures, fond of being revered and esteemed, who pry into the shortcomings of others and never know their own, who are attached to their own opinion, which comes from a want of humility." And, in fact, she only received into her monasteries those whom she well knew to be endowed with a good understanding; because those who are devoid of this, however good they may be, never accommodate themselves to everything, as those in religious communities should do.

One person of perverted intellect or turbulent mind is sometimes
 333 enough to spoil and throw into disorder, in fact to ruin and destroy, the entire credit and good observance of a monastery of nuns, or convent of religious men, and in an entire province; and one such person

would equally suffice to destroy one of our Congregations, if it did not employ the remedy which it has in its power of expelling him.

But, since *turpius ejicitur quam quod admittitur hospes* [it is worse manners to eject a guest than to refuse to admit him], to avoid so great a danger, and perhaps no slight injury, every Congregation is bound, before accepting a postulant, to make the most earnest endeavour to know thoroughly whether he is of good capacity or not, because this is the principal point. Moreover, we must remember that persons who have the reputation of spirituality, if they have a great opinion of themselves, easily uproot the devotion of others; on the other hand, certain gentle natures who have not this desire to pass for men of learning and teachers of spirituality, succeed far better. And as our Lord says that Heaven is for the poor in spirit, so does the whole life of St Philip tell us that the Congregation is for the humble.

Those persons who are much honoured by the world, or in high esteem, should be taught that in our Congregation honour and esteem consist in self-contempt and self-abasement. Any one, says St Teresa, who wishes to introduce into a monastery other honour than this, had better remain at home with his honour; and the same should be said to any one thinking of entering our Congregation. Consequently, we must be very cautious about receiving persons of high birth or great name. I do not say they should all be excluded, because at times there may be, as there have been, some most successful; but, I repeat, we must be very cautious. For although persons of rank, if they have a good spirit, are generally more generous than others, and more capable of doing great things; nevertheless, there is greater danger of their being attached to certain points of honour and reputation, which is quite contrary to that holy humility so necessary for our Congregation. When these qualities of nobility, learning, honour, reputation, or goodness, do not lose themselves in the sea of Christian humility, they do not answer for us. 334

How many famous religious Orders have lost their first fervour and grown cold in spirit, either through the pretensions of nobles or the pride of learning, or through the secular honours which the world introduced within them! Did not St Francis of Assisi exclaim: "O Paris! Paris! thou dost ruin my Order"?

At times subjects of high rank or great learning are received under pretext of increasing the influence of the Institute, even if they do

not themselves suggest this motive. But this is a grievous effort; for all the credit of a religious community comes from the holiness of its members, and not from their worldly qualities.

335 There is no less danger with regard to rich subjects who bring some advantage to houses scantily provided with temporal goods; because if we lean upon these, from being free men we become slaves, and easily fall to the ground, like one leaning on a reed too frail to support him. St Frances of Rome, at the persuasion of her nuns, after many entreaties, received a young girl who was very rich. After this her community suffered from many and grave troubles and endless detraction; and one day, as the Saint was in prayer, she had a vision of the Blessed Virgin, St Paul, St Benedict, and Mary Magdalene, who gave her a solemn reproof, and bade her dismiss this girl from her convent, which she accordingly did.

The Venerable Father Giovanni Battista Magnanti, of the Congregation of Aquila, used to advise also great caution in receiving persons of melancholy disposition, because such a one, he said, is often the Aristarchus of the community, who scrutinises what every one else does, and will do nothing himself. Experience, moreover, proves that melancholy subjects do not generally answer, and do not persevere; it seems that our holy Father, who was always cheerful, does not approve of them.

For this reason, adds Father Lenzi, our rules and customs exact that before receiving subjects they should be tried for a time outside the house, and their ways carefully studied, and they must not be received in a hurry, or, as it were, in the dark; because in this way we easily lay hold, not of Jacob for Esau, but of Esau for Jacob.

336 Finally we must be careful not to admit into our Congregation restless minds, because in their case the greater their acquirements and talents the greater the mischief they can do. I knew one subject of a Congregation, a man of very turbulent nature, who through charity was tolerated for many years; but afterwards, when he was raised to higher offices, by certain confidences made first to one and then another of the Fathers, and by insinuations, he so disturbed the Congregation that the Fathers did not know what to say, and began to distrust one another, and it seemed as if charity were beginning to cool. At last it pleased God that the arts of this disturber should be discovered, and some other cause also supervening, he was dismissed;

for it is clearly expressed in the Institute that the Congregation has free power to remove and expel those who trouble it. *Cum sit Congregationi nostræ liberum omnes graviter delinquentes, vel statum ejus perturbantes, de convictu, et familia suorum dimovere ac depellere* ('Our congregation is free to remove and expel from their community and family all those who are gravely delinquent, or who disturb its condition', Admonitio in fine Inst.)

Those subjects who desire admission into our houses. must, according to the mind of the holy Founder, be given of their own accord to the exercise of holy meditation, and to frequenting the sacraments; they must not be contentious, pertinacious, or obstinate, nor proud in their conduct towards either their superiors or their inferiors; they must be so watchful over themselves, that each day they may make greater progress in virtue; and they must, above all, be ready to obey in all things and at all times, even in those things most humbling and repugnant, *in humillimis et durissimis* (Inst. cap. vi.)

St Philip insisted so much upon this point, and he was such an enemy to disobedience, that he desired that those who showed any notable repugnance to anything should be immediately dismissed from the Congregation. On this subject we read in a manuscript, in his own handwriting, the following words:—"In case a man feels that he cannot go on without making a disturbance, either with regard to the food, or to what he has to do in the church, or wherever he may be employed, he should seek to obtain permission to leave the Congregation as quickly as possible, otherwise after the first or second fault he will be dismissed; because, my Fathers, I am most determined not to keep in the house men who do not observe the few orders which have been given them." Woe, then, to him who is disobedient! for although the Saint is dead, he will nevertheless reward the exact and punish the guilty. 337

Cardinal Baronio wrote thus to Father Consolini: "Be certain that our holy Father still lives, sees, and governs his sons, and holds the rod in his hand for the disorderly." If, therefore, we would prevent the Saint from chastising us, we must before receiving subjects, either as priests or lay-brothers, have exact knowledge of their life, disposition, and habits. It is not enough that the two Fathers, who according to the Rule are deputed to gather the necessary information, should take all possible means for learning everything about them; but all must be

338 equally zealous in obtaining information, in order to avoid mistakes. It is true, that there is the probation of one month in the house previous to being admitted to the probation of the first year, and then again that of the two other years, which form the three of the noviciate, which every one must pass through before being inscribed as a member of the community. But it is easy in these three years for them to hide their disposition, especially as during that time they have no employment or office which may make them known, but attend only to themselves in the holy exercises which are assigned to them; and, therefore, it is important to be certain beforehand, as far as possible, of the interior and exterior qualities of the postulant, that we may not afterwards have cause to repent of having accepted him.

I.

Now, after having considered what subjects should be received into our Congregation, according to the mind of the holy Founder, and who should be refused or expelled; let us reflect, how beautiful and estimable an Excellence is that which the same subjects enjoy in being always free to leave the Congregation when they wish, and how useful it is for the Congregation itself to possess the power of sending away at any time those who become unworthy.

339 As to the liberty of leaving and abandoning the Congregation, Father Lenzi says that many are of opinion that the beauty or particular prerogative of our Institute consists in being able to leave it when you are unwilling to stay longer in it. But this is a most serious error. The beauty of our Congregation lies in our subjects not being imprisoned, or bound by the chains of rigorous laws, but by love, which is stronger than death itself. Its beauty is that its subjects always serve as volunteers, and serve at their own cost, like volunteer soldiers attached to an army, who if they behave with as much valour as the others in fighting the enemy, are held in higher esteem and acquire great fame. This, then, is the prerogative of our subjects, always to have the liberty of abandoning the Congregation, and yet not to abandon it through love and fidelity to our vocation.

But I will discuss it leisurely with you, my dear Fathers, for whom especially I have drawn up this little work. If any of you were to be tempted actually to quit the Congregation into which you once so earnestly sought for admission, your vocation either came or did not

come from God. If you entered the Congregation without being especially called by God, but only for human ends; as, for instance, in order to be more easily admitted to holy orders (which would be to deceive the bishop), or to escape some persecution or some unfortunate undertaking, or to save expense for some time, or for other similar ends, you have done no small evil; because you have thus deceived the Congregation which would never have accepted you had it known your intentions, as our Rule exacts from all who enter a most firm resolution of persevering in the Congregation until death, although there is neither vow nor oath; and this so binds us to perseverance that we cannot allow ourselves to be taken out of it, not even by the counsel of 340 the Sovereign Pontiff (unless his apostolic command be added to it), even though it be for the benefit of the Church. If, then, your vocation was from God, and was considered to be such and approved by your confessors, or other prudent men, whose advice you took, how could you leave the Congregation without incurring the stain of infidelity and inconstancy?

You will, perhaps, tell me that it is no sin, inasmuch as there is no law which obliges you to remain for ever; and if it was an intention, it was not a vow. Nevertheless, our St Francis of Sales says that the love and the fidelity which we owe to our vocation, will as strongly constrain us to act like good Christians as if we were obliged to it under pain of eternal death. It is the general opinion of the holy Fathers that if we voluntarily lose our vocation, we are in great danger of losing our eternal salvation. If the refusal to obey one solitary inspiration from God may be the ruin of a soul, what will it be not to remain firm in our vocation? "Remain in the vocation to which you were called," says St Paul. The reason is manifest. The vocation, whatever it may be, if from God, is a means ordained by God Himself for our salvation. If we neglect such a means, God is no longer obliged to give us others; on the contrary, being displeased by our inconstancy, infidelity, and ingratitude, He is very likely to deny them to us.

Some, by way of excusing their inconstancy, say that they do not 341 know if their vocation was a true one; and by casting doubt upon it they fancy that they justify their infidelity. I answer that, if they did not enter the Congregation from whim, caprice, or other human ends, as has been said above, but with the right intention of serving God and the better ensuring their salvation, this same holy intention inspired

by God is a sign that their vocation was true. Nor ought we readily to doubt it when it has placed us where, by the observance of the Rule, we have a moral certainty of saving our souls, and also of sanctifying ourselves if we will.

St Ignatius of Loyola used to remind his sons that a novice, and still more one who is already professed, should not discuss whether such be his vocation, but must cause it to be so; and as long as he can increase in virtue and charity, he must not discuss as to the more or the less, but continue in his good undertaking and persevere unto the end.

These doubts are wont to be temptations, excited by some slight passion which has entered our hearts and obscured the light of the soul. But how imprudent would it be to leave a certain good for an uncertain one! I know not what favour he can obtain from God who has not God for his companion on his way, but some passion which is trying to allure him from out his nest.

342 If the Fathers of the Oratory, repenting of their undertaking, use their liberty and abandon the Congregation without any legitimate cause, but through weakness or inconstancy, because they are unwilling to submit any longer to such continual obedience, or to an uncongenial Superior, or because they will not tolerate some mortification, or some brother of unaccommodating disposition, or because they are weary of prayer and of the other holy exercises and labours, oh! what will become of them? Such infidelity to their vocation will be punished by pitiless remorse during their whole lives, and the withdrawal of many important graces, not to speak of other greater chastisements.

I could recount many fearful examples of what has happened to those who have left the Congregation without legitimate cause, and how they have made a most sad and miserable end. Experience has shown that they lead restless and troubled lives, full of bitter self-reproach; and the greater part of them try to gain admission anew, which is, however, very difficult, as we shall see further on. My consolation is, that with all the liberty which they think they have out of the Congregation, they can say no harm of it, nor can they lose their esteem for it.

If they would excuse themselves on the plea of the vehemence of the temptation which drove them forth, I would say to them, Then it was not the work of God, who, if He allowed this temptation to

prove your fidelity, did so that He might have occasion to reward it by granting you the gift of perseverance, as He does to so many who fight bravely against it. True fidelity remains firm in occasions when it might be unfaithful, since there is no great glory in conquering without opposition. The valour and merit of a soldier consists in being able to show his body covered with wounds, and yet never to have stirred from his post. The King of Heaven will receive with joy and freely reward those faithful and constant servants who have held firm against the enemy, and not those who on the first summons have surrendered. 343

I resume, then, by saying that this Excellence of the Congregation does not consist in the liberty which subjects have of leaving it when it pleases them; but in being always free, without any bond, and always serving God as volunteers. It consists also in this, that the subjects who leave the Congregation do not lose much of their good name, since the world knows that there is this liberty in our Congregation, and does not make great account of their doing so; especially as it may not know whether this has happened with or without a legitimate cause; while, on the contrary, it lays much stress (and with reason) on seeing professed religious leave their convent or monastery; because if they leave it without legitimate cause and special dispensation from the Sovereign Pontiff, they are open apostates; and even those who leave it during their noviciate, before they are bound by vows, have much ado to defend themselves; for the world will consider them inconstant, rather than believe that they have good and just reasons for it, as indeed they may have, for instance, when they have not health or strength sufficient for the austerity of their Orders.

II.

As this state of perpetual liberty is a great prerogative of the subjects of the Oratory, so also is that power which the Congregation possesses of purifying itself by expelling from its bosom those who might injure it by their inobservance and bad example. 344

Cardinal Carlo della Rovere used to say, that the Congregation was like the sea, and cannot tolerate in its bosom bodies dead unto virtue, but casts them up on the shore of the world as soon as they are drowned either in vice or in obstinacy. This cannot happen, he said, in religious Orders, as they are obliged to retain their subjects on account of the vows by which they are bound. Another said that the

Congregation was like a pot which is always boiling, and while it boils the scum floating on the surface is taken off.

Father Lenzi says, that all the sons of St Philip must ever be apprehensive of the danger of being sent away from the Congregation, and driven back into the perils from which God in His mercy had withdrawn them; and the best and most humble are wont to fear more than the others.

345 Father Antonio Agostino Bozzio, of the Congregation of the Oratory of Turin, a man of great learning and piety, commonly known as the "Hidden Saint," to distinguish him from the Venerable Father Valfrè, whose sanctity was more evident, confided to me twice over his great fear of being driven out of the Congregation, although he was one of the senior Fathers in it, above sixty years of age, and had already been Superior of the house. I admired this unusual fear, as an effect of his profound humility; but at the same time I reflected that if so great a man feared, much more should those fear who have not attained to his virtue.

The manner in which, and the causes for which, subjects, whether priests or lay-brothers, even the senior ones, as well as those who have only passed their triennialate, may be expelled, are specified in the Rules. The causes must be grave and important; for instance, when a subject disturbs the general peace of the house, or cannot accommodate himself to the humours of others, or does not choose to obey, or has committed some grave offence. In judging what these offences are, or whether the causes be doubtful or certain, no one can interfere except the Congregation itself; for it is necessary to have the votes of two-thirds of the decennial Fathers of the house, to decide whether the cause is sufficient for dismissal. In this case notice is given to the person dismissed, either by word of mouth or by writing, in those terms of Christian charity which each one would wish to be used towards himself in a similar position.

346 With regard to sending away novices, as they are not yet numbered among the members of the Congregation, such grave causes are not needed; it is sufficient that they be judged by the greater part of the community to be unfitted for the Institute.

It is true that, before sending away either the one or the other, the Congregation first treats them in the kindest and most charitable manner possible; it suggests the most opportune advice, often repeated,

to make the delinquent reflect and amend his ways; for since expulsion is the last and most painful remedy, we must set about it with reluctance; as our Cardinal Colloredo said to the Superior of a Congregation, "*Consilia separationis plus perturbant infirmos bonos, quam corrigant inquietos malos*" [a policy of exclusion is more likely to cause grief to good men who are weak than it is to correct bad men who are troublesome]. But when we find that with all the remedies applied no amendment follows, then we come to the decree of expulsion, taking care to frame it in respectful terms, to avoid, if possible, derogating from the reputation of the person dismissed, and from the charitable character of the Congregation.

The cases of sending away subjects who are triennials, Father Lenzi says, are of rare occurrence, because seldom do we meet with such arrogance and obstinacy as to oblige the Congregation to take this step. And the reason why these cases so seldom occur is, because the subject who does not live as he ought, or who does not like our community life, without letting things go so far and waiting to be dismissed, having his freedom in his hand, makes use of it himself. Although St Philip did not dismiss a single one during his long life, he said clearly that those were to be sent out of the Congregation who would not obey, or who rendered themselves in any way unworthy of remaining in it, as may be seen in the 19th chapter of his Life, written by Father Bacci; and he has left us this written rule, which was approved with the others by the Sovereign Pontiffs. 347

By the death of the infamous Judas, who betrayed his Divine Master Jesus Christ, the Apostolic College was purified; and by the exclusion of a vicious subject the Congregation is purified, thus doing what the Apostle says, "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste ... and put away the evil one from among yourselves."¹ An incident related in the Sacred Scriptures forcibly proves the necessity of expelling an evil-doer. Joab was besieging the city of Abela; already his soldiers were attempting to destroy its walls, when a wise woman of that city asked to speak to Joab. She said: "Why seekest thou to destroy this city and ruin the inheritance of the Lord?"² That is not my intention, answered the general, but only to capture the perfidious Seba, who has taken refuge in this your city after rebelling so unjustly

¹ 1 Cor. v. 7.

² 2 Kings xx. 14.

against David my king. Deliver unto me his head, and immediately the siege shall be raised. This was done, and the city remained free, at peace and uninjured. In the same manner will every house of the Congregation be free, at peace, and perfectly happy, when the Seba, if there be such a one in it, has been driven forth. Thus the Congregation which was afflicted will be consoled, and you will perceive that God permitted this blow, not to strike it down, but to cleanse and purify it.

348

To escape, then, the punishments with which God is wont to visit a community for the guilt of one of its members, Superiors must diligently examine the doings of all their subjects, and must find out with whom they associate and converse, and what they do within and without the house. They must observe who miss the Oratory and the other community duties, and whether it is from a just cause or not, and apply with charity the best remedies they can, *in spiritu lenitatis*. They must correct them with a view of leading them to penance, and so moving God to pardon them, that no one of us may have to hear the lamentable command, "*Tollite de medio vestrum.*" Drive out from among you him who has placed the scourge in the divine hands.

III.

From what has been said there might arise the question whether the Congregation of the Oratory, which has the power of dismissing its subjects for grave faults, may receive them again, when they show themselves truly penitent, and ask with humble and fervent prayers to be admitted anew. The same question was put to the Abbot St Antony, who answered it with this similitude: If a vessel were to leave the harbour laden with merchandize, and after having been buffeted by storms, the hulk alone were to return safe to port, would it be reasonable to receive it, or to sink it?

349 St Bernard was of the same opinion, for he wrote as follows to a monk who was very unwilling to take back another monk who had been expelled from the monastery, although he implored with most humble supplication to be again received:—"The Monk Adamanus laments that not only wert thou more active than the other monks in driving him out, but also that on account of thy resistance he cannot obtain the desired reconciliation. Beware lest thy zeal be guided by human prudence alone, and consider if thou wouldst have done to thyself

what thou dost to him. Canst thou hole for mercy from God if thou dost not use mercy with others? I ask not whether he were expelled unjustly or justly; I grieve, that as he gives the monastery satisfaction, repeating his entreaties, suffering his punishment with patience, and promising amendment, thou shouldst refuse to grant his request. Certainly, if he were unjustly expelled, it is just to recall him; if justly, it is a charitable act to receive him back."

This is, moreover, the advice which the Venerable Father Mariano Sozzini gave to the Congregation of the Oratory of Florence, stating in one of his letters that the Congregation of Rome had thus acted towards a Father who had been out of the house for five years. I am quite sure that the Congregation of Rome, which all other Congregations copy as their mother and mistress, would not have done this without just and well-weighed reasons; for if we ought to proceed most cautiously in receiving a subject for the first time, we ought not to take back those who have been sent away, except after much and mature consideration.

350

It seems to me that, according to the custom I have observed in some Congregations, this distinction may be made, submitting my judgment, however, to that of my betters. Supposing a subject was dismissed from the Congregation because he really disturbed the peace of the community, I should say that he ought on no account to be taken back, and I should advise in these cases a persistent refusal; because such restless minds are in general wanting in good judgment, and this is not easy, nay, almost impossible, to acquire, short of a miracle. For a time, for fear of again being expelled, he would remain quiet; but at length he would show himself again in his true colours. If, however, he had been sent away for other causes, such as grave disobedience, or other shortcomings, and there was a reasonable probability that he was truly reformed, I think it would be doing him an injury not to use clemency. We are all of us men, subject to failings, but we are also capable of correction with the grace of God; and this suffices. But if there is not this probability, why take him back? If he was dismissed for fear lest his vices might corrupt the Congregation, why place it again in danger of new infection?

The Congregation then must use, on proper occasions, this great Excellence which it possesses of purifying itself by the expulsion of bad subjects; but this does not oblige it to refuse to take back those who

351 have been already dismissed, who implore with reiterated entreaties to be re-admitted, and show every hope of real improvement. How many religious there have been who, having apostatized and fled from their monasteries, when they were reconciled, after having truly repented, did wonders? St Ambrose says that true penitents are wont to be more fervent than the innocent themselves. After taking them back, the best and safest thing would be to make them begin their noviciate again, and to use the greatest care and vigilance in their regard, until we see that their change is in all respects sincere and lasting.

IV.

Now, to show that so long as the Fathers of the Oratory observe their engagements they are very dear to God, I wish to point out that Jesus Christ, who willed to have various states in His Church, has, moreover, willed to give in His own person an example of them all. He gave an example to the Fathers of the Oratory, that they should serve God freely and voluntarily, when, to comply with the will of the Eternal Father, namely, to redeem the world, He offered Himself readily to do it at any cost: "Lo, here am I, send Me:"³ and when He showed Himself willing to suffer the pre-ordained torments of the Passion; "He was offered because it was His own will." And, in fact, as He was pleased to come into this world to be born amidst the misery of a poor cave, to be obedient to Mary and Joseph, to pass all His life in labour and travail, to announce to the nations His new law and
 352 His Gospel; so did He go of His own accord, on the last evening into the city of Jerusalem, with His Apostles, to eat the supper prescribed by the law; and to the Garden of Olives, where He knew that His enemies were awaiting Him, and that all the measures were already taken to arrest Him and put Him to death. He need not have become Incarnate, and after having become Incarnate and taken upon Himself the arduous task of redeeming the world; He need not have suffered as He did, because, for its redemption, one tear, one sigh alone, would have sufficed, through the power and merit of his Divine Person; all this was of His own choice. If, then, He suffered such fearful torments, it was because He willed to suffer. He suffered for zeal for the glory of his Father and the salvation of souls, as He had already made known

³ Isa. vi. 8.

by the mouth of the royal prophet: "For the zeal of Thy house hath eaten me up, and the reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me."⁴ As if to say to His Father, The chief cause of My fearful sufferings was not any absolute necessity; it was not the avarice of Judas, nor the envy of the Pharisees, nor the injustice of the judges, nor the hatred of the Jews, nor the cruelty of the executioners, but solely My zeal for Thy glory, O My Father, solely zeal for Thy house, that is, the most ardent, infinite love of Thy Church. This it was that sold Me by means of Judas, that delivered Me into the hands of My enemies; this it was that slew, devoured, and consumed Me: *Zelus, zelus domus tue comedit Me* [zeal, zeal for thy house hath devoured me]. Behold the model of the sons of St Philip who, in imitation of 353 their Saviour, do what they do in the service of God spontaneously and of their own free will, and can say with Him, *Voluntarie sacrificabo tibi* [I will sacrifice to thee willingly], out of zeal for the glory of God, for the salvation of souls, and for their own greater perfection.

⁴Ps. lxxviii. 10.

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSION

THE HAPPINESS OF THE PRIESTS OF THE ORATORY IF THEY PERSEVERE

The ancient philosophers in their researches into what constitutes the natural happiness of man, varied in opinion. The Epicureans said, that it consists in the pleasures of the body, without reflecting that this is the happiness of beasts and not of man, who is born to be happy in the soul and spirit, more than in the body. The Stoics maintained that it was in indifference and insensibility to all things; they did not understand that to be happy it is not enough to be free from grief, but it is also necessary to have much enjoyment. The Platonists placed it in the contemplation of truth; but truth, which may satisfy the intellect, cannot satisfy the will, which hungers after what is good as well as what is true. The Peripatetics, who were wiser than the others, affirmed that it consists in the enjoyment of all that is honourable, useful, and delightful.

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But since, in the present state of man, which is a state of fallen nature, of ignorance, misery, and lamentation, it is impossible that he can have everything which he desires, without any admixture of those evils which he fears, hence all philosophy is forced to conclude that in our present state there is no happiness for man; and if man hopes for it, he hopes in vain.

355

But the science of the Saints (which is the true philosophy of Christians), beholding things in a different light, encourages man to hope, that although he cannot be happy with natural happiness in his present state, he may nevertheless be happy with a much greater happiness, even in this life, namely, a supernatural happiness. But what is this happiness? It is that which is the work of virtue, and not the gift of nature; it springs from courage, instead of being a gift of fortune; it owes nothing to accident or chance, but everything to our own labour and diligence. It is a work for future eternal happiness, and therefore

a work of present happiness and joy. For what can be more joyful and happy than night and day to work at your own eternal happiness? "Thou shalt eat the labours of thy hands; blessed art thou, and it shall be well with thee."¹

And although we must work out our eternal salvation, as the Apostle warns us, "with fear and trembling," it does not case to be true happiness, because this fear and trembling turn us away from sin, and sin alone can trouble happiness. Moreover, faith teaches us that our works infallibly follow us after death.² What in this life is merit, in the next will be changed into a hundredfold reward. What happier fate, then, can befall us in this life than to be able every day to increase our immortal riches, to carry them ourselves securely over the ocean of this life, and with them to build an eternal mansion for ourselves according to our taste?

It is true that this work of eternal happiness cannot be done without labour and pain, nor without interior and exterior mortification; hence the same Apostle said that the servants of God are *quasi tristes, semper autem gaudentes* [as if sorrowful, but always rejoicing].³ But how can they be joyful and at the same time sorrowful? Remark, that he does not say *tristes*, but *quasi tristes*; because that is no true sadness which afflicts only the body, or it is sadness only of nature, the inferior part, which abhors all suffering; but that only is real sadness which affects the mind; and whosoever has not this sadness of mind is always happy, as the wise man attests, *Felix qui non habuit animi sui tristitiam* [happy is he who has no sadness in his soul].⁴ Now, a Christian who serves God, and works for his eternal salvation, cannot have this sadness of mind, even should he be a layman living in the midst of the world, so full of troubles; much less can a religious, not only because in his state he labours with more peace, and at a greater distance from the many dangers of the world which are capable of spoiling his work, but also because he has more efficacious means of perfecting it. I do not intend here to dilate on the happiness of religious of any Order; because it is well known, and authors without number have written in the true happiness of those religious who live, as they should do, in

¹Ps. cxxvii. 2.

²Apoc. xiv. 13.

³2 Cor. vi. 10.

⁴Ecclus. xiv. 2.

their holy state according to their own rules. But I will restrict myself to speaking only of that particular happiness which priests of the Oratory, who persevere in the houses of St Philip, enjoy in the observance of their Institute.

I.

Their greatest happiness consists in seeing the Congregation, their mother, enriched by God with the many Excellences which we have described. They fully appreciate their good fortune in being called by God to so high an end, the very same to which the Apostles were called, namely, prayer, the administration of the Sacraments and the Word of God; and also to follow the three maxims so much inculcated by Christ, as we said in the first chapter of this book; they cannot but be joyful to have met with so glorious a lot, and therefore they are *semper gaudentes*.

Charity, which reigns in the Congregation, as its principal element and fundamental rule, renders them supremely contented and happy; because there is in truth nothing, either in the social or Christian life, sweeter than the union of hearts. What sweetness, what joy, is there not amongst those who are united in heart, feeling, and desire? Charity produces on earth an image of heaven; and the great benefit of this mutual charity may best be learned from its opposite, namely, dissen- 358
sion, which, wherever it enters, at once makes a hell in this life.

Interior mortification, which generally frightens men, so prone to take pleasure in their own inclinations, consoles the sons of St Philip; for as they are obliged to practice it at all moments, and consequently to combat their own passions, the source of all evils and disorders, they become in this way easily masters of them; and he who is master of his passions no longer feels in himself the tumult of the war which they wage until they are entirely vanquished and tamed. What happiness can be greater than this?

The obedience, ever free, voluntary, and loving, which they render to their Superiors and the officers of the Congregation, makes them no less happy. It is true, says St Thomas, that there is nothing in nature more attractive than liberty, which makes us masters of ourselves and of all things which we can use and enjoy. But since liberty brings on man so many misfortunes, and since the sole desire of independence, and of the satisfaction of his own will, leads him to perdition, he is

obliged to bind that liberty, and to subject his own will to God by means of obedience, by renouncing his own judgment, by the subjection of his feelings, and by yielding in all things to his Superiors, and allowing himself to be guided by them as a sheep by its shepherd. This once done, there is no longer any unhappiness to fear; according to St Bernard, "Let self-will cease to exist, and there will be no hell." If our
 359 will ceases to act according to its own inclination, there will be none other than the will of God, which will reign over ours; and the will of God, being the rule of all sanctity, will bear to us in its bosom all true happiness.

The priests of the Oratory experience another great happiness in being governed by their Superiors with sweetness, discretion, and prudence, which is the inheritance left by St Philip to those who were to succeed him in the government of his Congregation. It would, I know, be both more virtuous and more heroic to obey harsh and indiscreet Superiors, as Jesus Christ obeyed His unjust judges and cruel executioners. But this would presuppose eminent sanctity, which is not easily acquired. On the other hand, those who are guided with sweetness and discretion willingly submit to everything, doing with gladness and pleasure whatever is imposed upon them, and thus live peaceably and happily, and more easily acquire perfection.

Again, as a priest of the Oratory knows that in the Congregation a subject is not held in esteem because of his talents, noble birth, learning, or fortune, but solely because of his virtue, he has no cause for jealousy, since it depends on himself alone to gain the esteem and love of his Congregation by becoming virtuous, devout, obedient, observant of the rules, zealous for the honour of God and the good of souls; and, as befits a son of St Philip, he makes every effort to become such, and finds his happiness therein.

But who can understand his supreme happiness in being detached
 360 from love both of property and of his relations? Attachment to riches causes a man great unhappiness, as you will have already seen in the eighth chapter of this book; detachment from them makes him happy, because it frees him from those vile and troublesome occupations which are necessary for their acquisition. Has not our Saviour said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit"? Attachment to relations so fetters the liberty of an ecclesiastic or religious, that it is very difficult for him to serve God as fervently as he ought. On the other hand, detachment

from them frees his spirit from all those thoughts and occupations which are not for heaven; and far from the troubles and business of his family he enjoys tranquil peace in his own state; for the Gospel has promised to him who, for the love of God, leaves father, mother, brothers, and sisters, a hundredfold in this life and eternal happiness in the next.

I will not speak of the happiness which priests of the Oratory enjoy through the beautiful virtue of chastity, because this is experienced not only by religious of every Institute who make the vow of it, but even by those of the laity who preserve it in the midst of the world. But I will say that they have a most singular happiness in the obligations imposed by the rule of not accepting ecclesiastical dignities, which have been felt by many to be such heavy crosses that they have resigned them in order to regain the happiness experienced in a humble and obscure life, which they had lost amid the many honours and distractions unavoidable in their exalted positions.

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Passing on, then, to the good name which the Congregation enjoys in the world, this rejoices them not a little, because they know that this good name can spring from no other source than the perfection which is found in that Congregation, and because they know that the company of so many men who are devoted to the acquisition of perfection will greatly help them to acquire it.

Moreover, the power of the Congregation to expel corrupt members also makes those who are observant very happy, by assuring them that they will not have to live long with those who are arrogant, turbulent, or scandalous. Although there may be some in our Congregation who are imperfect, it would be great temerity and folly to attempt so to reform a religious community that the slightest imperfection should never be found in it, since this was not the case even in the Apostolic College; it is not possible so long as we live on earth, it is reserved for heaven, where we shall all be perfect, because we are made like to God. "We shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is."⁵

This reminds me of the beautiful answer which the Blessed Maria Maddelena Orsini gave to a nun in her community. This sister showed great anxiety for the spiritual advancement of the monastery, and observing certain imperfections in some nuns, she went to the Blessed Maria Maddelena, who was Abbess, and with indiscreet zeal warned

⁵ 1 John iii. 2.

- 362 her that she should take into consideration such and such faults which had offended her. The Mother Abbess took her advice in good part, and with her accustomed sweetness promised to find the proper remedy. But this sister, who was of the number of those who wish to reform others without beginning by first setting them a good example, not satisfied with this gentle answer, replied that it was necessary to arrange this matter, and so thoroughly that similar inobservance might not recur, adding that she was of opinion that two monasteries should be made in the same house; in the one should be enclosed all the nuns of bad disposition, who were odd, cross, obstinate, slothful in early rising, tepid, talkative, imperfect; in the other, the good, the fervent, patient, gentle and pleasant, and all those who were considered virtuous, mortified, and punctually observant of the rule. The prudent mother, on hearing this pleasant proposal, tried not to laugh, and said, "And you—in which of these two monasteries would you wish to live?" "In the one for the good nuns," replied this simple creature, "in order to meet with no disturbance or difficulties in my spiritual life" "And I," answered the mother, "in that of the bad ones, either because I am amongst their number, or because I should find room to merit greatly by sympathizing with their failings, and many occasions for practising sweetness, patience, and charity towards them." When the nun heard this admirable reply, she was silent and perceived her mistake; that while she thought she was one of the good ones, she was, on the contrary, wanting in humility, patience, and charity.

Imperfections, then, do not make a Congregation bad, because even the Saints have had some, as St Francis of Sales said; but only the disorders and scandals which may gain the upper hand in it; and our Congregation has the power of ridding itself of these by expelling bad subjects, as has been seen in the preceding chapter.

Moreover, the liberty which the Fathers of the Oratory have of always leaving the Congregation when they wish, gives them another great happiness in being faithful to it unto death. What greater happiness can a son of St Philip have than to be able to say every hour, For the love of God I will always hold fast to my resolution, "My justification which I have begun to hold I will not forsake"?⁶ What more profitable happiness than to be able to say at the point of death, I have always served my God; of my own free will I might at any mo-

⁶Job xxvii. 6.

ment have abandoned my engagement in the house of St Philip, but, by the grace of God, I have never abandoned it; I have done nothing by constraint, but all from love? "Blessed is the man who could have transgressed, and hath not transgressed."⁷

We may add to this great happiness enjoyed by the priests of the Oratory on account of the twelve Excellences granted by God to the Congregation of St Philip, four reasons which render it still greater.

1. They are in a special manner sons of Mary, the Queen of Heaven, since she was the Foundress of the Institute.
2. The Congregation of St Philip is peculiarly the house of God, 364 because it is the house of prayer. *Domus mea, Domus orationis* [My house shall be called a house of prayer].
3. It is a house where idleness, the mother and source of all evil, has never entered in. The idleness of a few hours caused the fall of King David and of many others who had already attained to the highest perfection. In our Congregation it is morally impossible that it can reign, for the holy Founder has disposed his Rules in such a way that he has left us neither time nor place to be dissipated; and subjects have hardly passed a few years or even a few months in the Congregation before they are forced to say, We have not even time to breathe.
4. The spirit of joyfulness is that which makes men happy, and this was the especial spirit of the holy Father. He was always joyous, facetious, and gracious. All fell in love with him because of the serenity of his face and the cheerfulness of his demeanour; in jest he gently corrected sinners and gained their hearts, inducing them to change their lives, and accompanied even the miracles he wrought with pleasantries. Be joyous, he used to say to them, and by pulling their hair, or giving them a box on the ears, or pressing them to his breast, he would drive out melancholy. He wished for this joyfulness in all the subjects of the Congregation; among others he much praised the Venerable Father Giovenale Ancina on account of his possessing a truly joyful spirit. And with good reason, for the service of God comes much more

⁷Ecclus. xxxi. 10.

365 easily and sweetly to a joyful spirit; and all that such a one does for God, however laborious, seems to him as nothing. *Labor meus*, said St Bernard, *labor vix est unius horæ, et si plus est, præ amore non sentio* [My work is the work of barely one hour, and if it is more, I do not feel it, out of love].

Joyfulness springs from divine love; with this you serve God as a son, and not as a slave, who serves through fear, which causes sadness. Those who serve God with sadness seem to wish to show that they do a great deal, and are fainting under the load: while they generally do much less than others, and all with weariness, which is entirely contrary to what the Apostle writes, "Not with sadness or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver."⁸ As a master prizes a servant who always works cheerfully, and dislikes the one who performs his duties gloomily and unwillingly, so God delights in him who serves Him with joy which makes him work with promptitude and love; like the Israelites who offered their gifts for the building of the temple with great joy, and the Machabees who "fought with cheerfulness the battle of Israel."⁹ He who does his actions with a joyful heart, does them with greater perfection, and consequently with greater merit. *Delectatio perficit operationem, tristitia corrumpit* [love completes a work, sadness destroys it]. A person who only works as if he were forced, looks to nothing except being able to say, "I have done." But the joyful man endeavours to do his work well; for joy enlarges the heart, sadness compresses it. The one causes him readily to despise the temptations of the enemy, the other makes him listen to them all with fixed attention, 366 and thus he is the more easily overcome.

This joy redounds, moreover, to the edification of our neighbour; for the laity seeing it are convinced that in the path of virtue there is neither that weariness nor that difficulty which the wicked imagine. The penitent who observes the joyful and serene face of that confessor, more readily makes known his sins and his interior to him; he would not do it thus easily if he saw in him a serious and severe exterior. By the first he hopes to be treated with sweetness; at the hands of the second he would expect to be met with rigour. The sick man when visited by a cheerful priest is easily consoled, more easily than if one

⁸ 2 Cor. ix. 7.

⁹ 1 Mac. iii. 2.

too serious and melancholy sought to console him with the strongest reasons and most powerful motives.

Souls are more easily gained to God by sweetness than by rigour. But it is very difficult for a melancholy man to use this sweetness, and it is easy for a joyful man. To the one it costs little to be gentle, for his joyfulness disposes him to it; to the other it costs much, and he will require great virtue, and to do great violence to himself not to act with severity. The Philippine Fathers endeavour in this way to imitate their holy Father, who was always joyful. It must always be understood, however, that their cheerfulness is accompanied by that holy modesty which their character demands.

Finally, those who serve God with joy may hope for holy perseverance; while, on the contrary, experience proves that in our houses those who are melancholy do not generally persevere. This great happiness 367 which priests of the Oratory enjoy, is not ideal or imaginary, but true and solid, because it leads them to God; and they must render to God continual thanks; for this happiness here on earth is a commencement of the eternal bliss which they shall one day enjoy in heaven.

II.

This happiness, so precious and so desirable, is not indeed for all those who enter into the house of St Philip, but only for those who have the grace of persevering therein. Perseverance affords great hope of eternal salvation to all those who are bound by the three solemn vows in any religious Order; but to the priests of the Oratory, who make no sort of vow, this perseverance becomes a great cross, from the fear and danger in which they always stand of not persevering because they are not bound; and this cross may produce great merit in them, which merit will always increase in proportion to their fear and danger, and bring them great happiness by making them Saints, according to the words of *Isaïas*, "Every one that shall be left in Jerusalem shall be called holy."¹⁰ A subject of the Congregation, says Father Lenzi, who loves his vocation, knowing that he cannot be assured of a single day of perseverance, feels an interior crucifixion, from which he can derive two great benefits. The one is that he humbles himself greatly because some trifling annoyance, or some little temptation not over- 368

¹⁰ *Isa.* iv. 3.

come, might deprive him of his precious hope. Hence we should never trust in ourselves, but ask this great grace continually of God, reciting every evening in the Little Oratory, with particular devotion, the five Paters and Aves, to obtain from God holy perseverance in His divine service, as the rule requires; and imploring it through the holy Father, who has promised us his assistance; for Father Pietro Consolini wrote thus: "The counsel and assistance which your Reverence asks will be given to you in due time and place by the holy Father, and I assure you that he has never failed those devout to him, especially those in the Congregation who follow his spirit." The second benefit derived by him who perseveres, is not to fear death, nay, rather to desire it; because, in fact, priests of the Oratory do not make their profession, like cloistered religious, at the completion of the noviciate, but only at the hour of death. *Qui perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit* [he who endures to the end will be saved].¹¹ And hence one of our old Fathers used to say, "The true sons of St Philip are recognised at their burial."

369 The Venerable Cardinal Baronio, at the point of death, when the doctors were trying to console him and give him still hopes of life, said to them, "I cannot fear that which I love"—*Illam timere non possum, quam diligo*; and while the recommendation of his soul was being made, he said, "Behold, now is the time of exultation and of joy; let us die!"

The Venerable Giovenale Ancina sighed so much for death that he wrote, "I am worn out with such weariness that I desire to die forthwith." When asked by Father Vazzolo, of the Congregation of Fossano, on the day preceding his death, how he felt about his illness, he answered, "I am burning with the desire of being united to God."

Father Bartolommeo Milo, who lived in this house when I was a novice, a little before his death, turned to me and said, "Is it possible that a sinner like myself can go to Paradise!" These words were uttered with serenity of countenance and joyfulness of spirit, and shortly after he added, "I rejoiced at the words that were said to me, We shall go into the house of the Lord,"¹² and peacefully expired

If we read the Historical Memoirs of Father Marciano, we shall see further how those die who persevere holily in the Congregation.

¹¹ Matt. xxiv. 13.

¹² Ps. cxxi. 1.

He says that St Philip appeared in the Chiesa Nuova to a Capuchin Father of holy life, and said to him "Tell the Fathers from me, for their consolation that up to this day, by the grace of God, all who have died in the Congregation scattered over the world have been saved;" and he added, "That the Congregation was pleasing to God, and also all its Rules; and that they were to hold them in esteem, and not to make the slightest innovation." Each one of us, then, must say with the Venerable Father Antonio Grassi, of the Congregation of Fermo: "This is my rest for ever and ever; here will I dwell, for I have chosen 370 it,"¹³ so as to be able to say like him in the agonies of death, "Oh, what a glorious thing to die sons of St Philip!"

III.

What, then, can ever make a subject leave the Congregation after having once entered it and experienced the happiness enjoyed therein? We must remember that the devil, who knows we are free and not bound by vows or oaths, will use every endeavour to make us forfeit our perseverance. And little, indeed, is required for this. It is enough that a subject have too much love for himself and for earthly things, that he be obstinate and unwilling to yield to any one, or that he make more account of his own opinion than of the observance of some small rule. Enough that he be wanting in humility, obedience, or charity; and perseverance will probably be wanting also. It is even enough that he become negligent in observing the Rules, to hinder his receiving such a gift, as our Institute clearly lays down: "For he may be quite sure, that anyone who is negligent about his salvation will hardly remain long where there must be progress in virtue and a pious emulation in perfection" (*Admonitio in fine Inst.*).

We must be persuaded that every thought which comes to us against our vocation is a delusion. The evil one is like a fisherman, who hides, behind the bait which attracts the fish, the hook which captures him. He waits for us to be agitated by passion through some disagreement with another father or brother; or some mortification disliked, 371 or considered unreasonable or inopportune; or some office assigned to us contrary to our inclination; some jealousy arisen in our heart, or some difference from our opinion in the General Congregations;

¹³ Ps. cxxxi. 14.

and then he dangles before us the bait of many beautifully coloured and plausible reasons, for instance, that there can be no strict obligation to persevere in one place, however holy, where there is no oath or vow, consequently there can be no sin in leaving it; that we might do equally well elsewhere; that if we leave the Congregation it is not to lead a dissipated life, but to spend it, if not more fervently, at least more quietly; and under the specious pretext of this fallacious good, which perhaps he who is tempted may never obtain, he entraps him and draws him out of his element.

372 Sometimes the cunning serpent endeavours to entice a subject out of his vocation under colour of greater perfection, as he tried unsuccessfully to do with Father Tarugi, inspiring him with the thought of leaving the Congregation to become a Capuchin. He also tried his wiles with Father Vazzolo of the Congregation of Fossano. He was furious at seeing the admirable progress which souls made under the prudent direction of that Father, and tried to get rid of the cause by inducing him to leave the Congregation. As he, from delicacy of conscience, found great difficulty in hearing confessions, the tempter assailed him on this side, suggesting that for him the Order of Capuchins would afford a more secure and perfect life, as it would be more austere, and he should not there have to render account to God of the administration of such a sacrament. He communicated this thought to Father Colla of the same Congregation, who had the like temptation to abandon it, from the difficulty he felt in preaching; and they both determined to become Capuchins, on condition, however, of first taking the advice of the Venerable Father Valfrè of the Congregation of Turin. They proceeded to that city, and directed their steps at once to the Church of St Philip, where the said Father was actually preaching; and they heard him interrupt his sermon, and exclaim, *Manete in ea vocatione in qua vocati estis* [remain in that vocation to which you were called], and repeating these words several times, he proved that to change your state when it was one to which you had been called by God, was a delusion. Both of them were thunderstruck on clearly perceiving that Father Valfrè had discovered their design, and given them a suitable remedy; they kept looking at one another; and, taking his words as if from heaven, they became so confirmed in their vocation that the thought of changing their state never entered their minds again.

At other times the devil will suggest to us, not to leave the Congregation of St Philip entirely, but to pass to another of his houses. But our holy Father, who by divine guidance has given us rules different from those of cloistered Orders, expressly desired that there should be no union whatever between his houses except a union of spirit, as 373 Father Consolini writes. By decreeing that each house should govern itself, and have no connection with the others, he has clearly shown that he does not wish any subject to pass from one Congregation to another, but where he first entered there let him persevere to the end of his life. *Usque ad vitæ obitum*.

I doubt whether those Congregations, which are very ready to receive subjects of another house, are entitled to the privileges of those which are founded after the model of that at Rome. I do not blame them when certain circumstances render it expedient. There may sometimes be good ground for it; for instance, if a subject notably suffered in his health from the air of the place, or met with some unavoidable persecution from externs, or other similar reasons. But when it is only from mere instability or other frivolous reasons, it would not be right for another Congregation to receive him. It is true that it is better for this subject to take refuge under the roof of St Philip, than under that of his own flesh and blood, when he has not the grace to persevere in the house in which he first entered; but, nevertheless, these words of the Gospel come home to us: "Remove not from house to house, and into whatsoever city you enter, abide there till you go thence."¹⁴

Nor can we say that the vocation is the same because one house of St Philip observes the same rules as another; since the houses not being united one with another, we break the essential rule of not changing. 374 The holy Father when he says that we are not to change our place of residence, gives many reasons for it, and this one in particular: "In order that the members of the Congregation should be the more firmly bound together by the tie of love, which daily habit fosters, and that the ways of each one may become known through this, and that all may respect the faces of their brothers" (Inst. cap. iv.). Hence the pretence of wishing to pass to another house, because it is also a house of St Philip, must be a temptation, and the change a delusion.

Monks are permitted to change their Monastery under obedience

¹⁴Luke x. 7; Matt. x. 11.

to their Superiors; nevertheless, St Bernard, having learned that an Abbot of Tre Fontane had changed his place of residence without due cause, wrote as follows to Pope Eugenius:—"The Abbot of Tre Fontane was well planted. I fear lest a good tree bringing forth good fruit, if transplanted, should bring forth none. We have sometimes seen a vine fertile in its first planting, and sterile in its second. We have seen a tree well planted, green and flourishing, which died when transplanted." Thus that subject will succeed well in the house of the Congregation to which he has been called, and in the other to which he has not been called his spirit will dry up. Therefore "into whatsoever house you enter, there remain: remove not from house to house;" because
 375 a vocation is not our own pleasure, says F. Lenzi, but the pleasure of God, to which, even in spite of our own repugnance and displeasure, we must conform ourselves.

At other times the devil causes a doubt to arise, whether our first vocation was true or not. But be so good as to tell me, has not the place where you are means sufficient to procure the salvation of your soul, if you would but profit by them? Why, then, by this doubt would you deprive it of these means, and with what conscience would you do so? When you desired to enter the Congregation and take possession of your vocation, neither you, nor your confessor, nor your prudent counsellors, had any doubt about it. How, then, has it grown doubtful with the passing of time? God is unchangeable; if He called you then He does not change His determination; and if He wished to call you to a more perfect state, He would find sure means for making His will known to you; for instance, if He wished you to be a Bishop, He would make the Pope command you to be one. Who are you, that you should turn your back upon the call, and seek no longer God, but your own will? And when you have satisfied your own will, would you be happy? It is impossible, because he whom God does not satisfy will never be satisfied. But let us clench the argument. Has this doubt come to you by revelation, or through some unmortified humour of yours? As long as things went according to your fancy, your vocation could not be better, nor more certain, but after having taken
 376 umbrage, or received some mortification, or disapproved of some of the Community practices, or the conduct of the Superior, or the decisions of the Congregation, the doubt arose. And do you not recognize the delusion? Then you have never had the spirit of St Philip, which

is a spirit of permanence and perseverance. You do not reflect that he expressed in very clear terms in his Institute, "that whosoever embraces it must absolutely have the intention of persevering unto death in the Congregation, for no other end than that of serving God" (Inst. cap. vi.).

This spirit and decree of his have been approved by the Holy See, so that it cannot be denied that perpetual permanence in the Congregation into which we have been once called to enter is the will of God clearly manifested to us. Why do you wish, for a doubt raised in your mind (God knows by whom or by what), to run the risk of contradicting the manifest will of God, and leaving a certain good for another most uncertain, which you figure to yourself in your mind when it is agitated by some passion or melancholy? In any case, to get rid of the trouble which this doubt occasions you, follow the advice which the holy Father gave you: "In important affairs three things are necessary, prayer, time, and counsel." Pray, ask of God with humility and fervour to enlighten you; and He of His goodness will be pleased to do so. Take time to consider, and be not precipitate, nor ever decide in a state of agitation; because then, as the understanding is obscured, it is easy to turn aside from the right path.

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Finally, consult experienced men filled with the fear of God, well versed in our Rules and our mode of life. If you have not confidence in those of the house in which you live, other houses of St Philip are not wanting, where you will find learned and prudent men who can give safe advice. If you distrust these also, or at least consider them prejudiced and partial because they are Philipines, seek for those who really and thoroughly know what the houses of St Philip are, otherwise you run the risk of being misled; for if they do not know them, however learned and prudent they may be, they may err, as we have seen in many cases. We know that to be mistaken in a matter of vocation, is no slight danger.

Never allow yourself to think that by your departure the Congregation will be the one to suffer, either because you have great talents, or at least imagine so, or because you have acquired great influence with the upper classes and the people, or because you pay a larger pension than the others; for, on the contrary, by the departure of an unstable subject the Congregation purifies itself, and will be able to say what Christ said of the ungrateful Apostle Judas: "When he (Judas) was

gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him.”¹⁵

I repeat again then, my dear fathers and brothers, for whom I have written this poor work, be content in your vocation. *Obsecro itaque vos, ut digne ambuletis vocatione qua vocati estis* [I beseech you to walk
378 worthily of the vocation to which you were called].¹⁶ If you persevere, the Congregation will be to you a paradise, however much you may be called upon to labour and to suffer in it.

St Francis of Sales writes that some lay persons, seeing his nuns of the Visitation so contented and happy, said, “Oh, what a fair paradise must that be where these servants of God live so happily!” “You are right,” he answered, “the place of their abode is indeed a paradise; but you do not know what it costs them, what mortifications, what surrender of self-will; in short, *oportuit multa pati?*” And thus the Congregation of St Philip is a paradise on earth; if, however, you ask the happy inhabitant what it costs him, he will answer you, *Me oportuit multa pati, et ita intrare* [it was necessary for me to suffer much and so enter]. What bitter pills, what hard obedience, what patience, before arriving at this sweetness, and the enjoyment of this precious peace which is tasted in the house of the Oratory! It is true that all pains and labours seem light, and at the hour of death will appear as nothing, because, as true sons of St Philip, everything is done of our own free will, for love of God alone, and love sweetens everything and makes us find in labours, mortifications, and pains our truest happiness.

But of what use would it be to have this happiness for a time, and then to give it up by leaving the Congregation? It would indeed be lamentable if, after having passed ten or twenty years in the house of St Philip, where true happiness is to be found, a subject should leave it
379 for reasons of small weight, because he could not bear some mortification, or through the seductions of his relatives, or other suggestions of the evil one. What a misfortune, solely because we could not persevere for a little longer,—to lose so great a good, to live ever after discontented, tormented by cruel remorse (as generally happens to him who has not a more than legitimate cause for leaving), to run the risk of being deprived of that eternal crown which God has resolved to give to perseverance alone, and to no other virtue, however great, without it!

¹⁵ John xiii. 31.

¹⁶ Eph. iv. 1.

The reward which He gives is unending; it is very just that the service which we render to Him, if it be short, should at least endure until death.

The true value of good works, and that which is worthy of the crown, is perseverance alone. *Virtus boni operis, perseverantia est* [perseverance is the strength of a good work], was the saying of St Gregory. Hence, perseverance alone will be rewarded by God in the priests of the Oratory, after they have tasted in this life that happiness in their state of which I have already spoken, and which they will surely enjoy if they observe exactly the holy Institute of St Philip, which they profess, and persevere in his Congregation even unto death. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."¹⁷

¹⁷Apoc. ii. 10.

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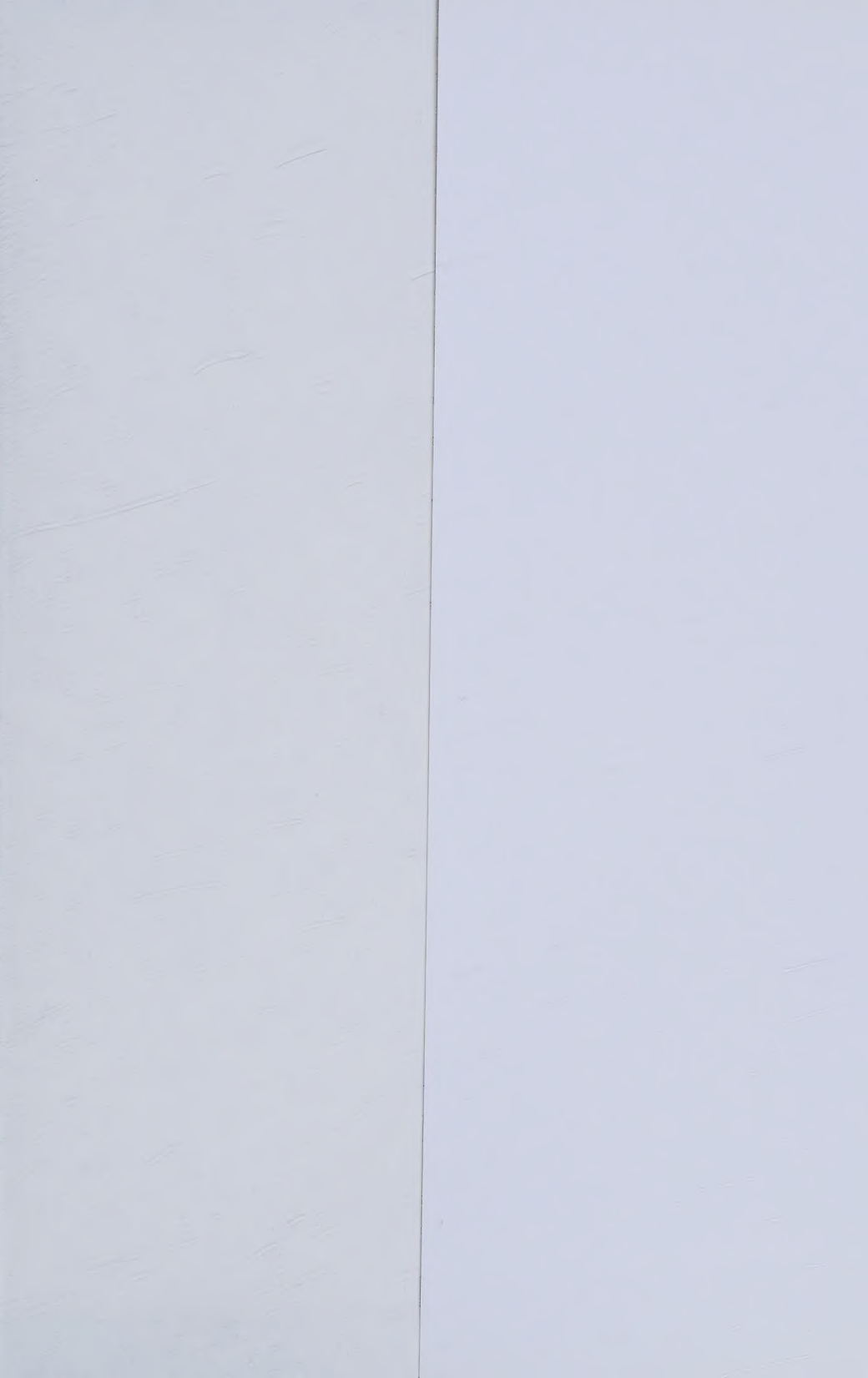
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THE END.







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